

Giving Up the Keys

HIGHLIGHTS

The Driver Safety Agenda

Introduces rationale and actions for promoting older driver safety

Why Older Adults Want To Continue Driving

Includes qualitative research about reasons older adults continue to drive

Reasons to Stop Driving

Lists internal decisions and external requirements

Planning to Stop Driving

Describes why drivers say they are reluctant to stop or to plan to stop driving

Financial, Physical, and Skill Challenges

Discusses financial and/or physical and cognitive limitations that older adults may face that require them to stop driving

Indicators of Unsafe Driving

Introduces signs of unsafe driving of which drivers should be aware

Driving Safety Tips

Outlines tips that may help extend the years one is able to drive safely

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

THE DRIVER SAFETY AGENDA

The delegates to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging made two resolutions regarding older adults' ability to get around in their communities: 1) to have transportation options and 2) to be able to retain their mobility and independence for continued safe driving.¹ It is expected that by 2025, more than 40% of fatal crashes will be due to age-related fatalities, with visual and cognitive impairments as contributing factors.²

Concerns about older driver safety has resulted in efforts to identify the reasons older adults want and need to drive and to understand their driving challenges. Although many continue to drive safely until their final days, research indicates there is a mismatch between driving expectancy and life expectancy. This results in a period of time (6 years for men and 10 years for women) when older adults may no longer be able to drive safely.³

WHY OLDER ADULTS WANT TO CONTINUE DRIVING

In 2007, a Beverly Foundation/APTA (American Public Transportation Association) project initiated field research with older adults who no longer drove, or who had limited their driving and used some other form of transportation. The research was undertaken in Southern California and included more than 100 older adult participants. Of the research participants:

- 87% associated stopping to drive with an event
- 67% had used public transit services prior to their "retirement" from driving
- 60% indicated they believed they had stopped driving at the right time
- 27% rated their current transportation option as only pretty good compared to their transportation when they were driving

¹ Report from the White House Conference on Aging, 2005.

² Data from National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, May 2003.

³ Daniel J. Foley et al., "Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Aged 70 Years and Older in the United States." American Journal of Public Health, 2002.

SOME REASONS OLDER ADULTS STOP DRIVING

The study participants gave a variety of reasons for stopping to drive, most of which were related to an event precipitated by an internal decision or external requirement. Internal decisions and external requirements were given as reasons for stopping to drive.

Internal Decision

sold the car
became disabled
no longer wanted to drive
had no money for gas
traffic created stress

External Requirement

couldn't pass the eye test
inability to renew license
doctor's recommendation
couldn't pass the driving test
family took away the keys

DID THEY PLAN TO STOP DRIVING?

Although none of the event-related reasons above were associated with planning, study participants gave a variety of reasons why they did not plan to stop driving.

"I never envisioned a time that I wouldn't drive. It was over before I knew it."

"I never considered I wouldn't drive. I had driven forever."

"I didn't think it would ever happen to me."

"Before I stopped driving, I never considered the bus."

"I had a car, so why would I think about the bus?"

The comments suggest that a major reason for not planning to stop driving may be that people expect they will always drive. Another indicator that people did not plan to stop driving is that only 27% of the participants checked the statement below:

"I planned for the time I would stop driving."

MANY WILL FACE SKILL CHALLENGES

Aging presents a variety of changes in physical and cognitive skills that impact driving. In fact, starting at about age 55, there may be a slow decrease in how well people process information, recognize, and judge driving events. Although they do not affect all older adults at the same age or in the same way, they impact skills that generally decline with age. Older adult drivers should be aware of the limitations that might result.

*Project research activities took place in 2006 and 2007 in Southern California. Activities included focus groups, survey instruments, one-on-one interviews, large group discussions, and an expert group meeting. Primary resources included a Beverly Foundation background paper, "Transitions to Transportation Options" and "Making Sense of Life's Changes" by William Bridges (2nd Edition, 2004).

The top four changes that can impact on driving are: vision, cognition, dementia, and physical conditions.

Visual Decline is generally the most critical loss for older adult drivers. It is what some refer to as “aging eyes.” The result may: 1) require more light to distinguish features along the road, 2) pose difficulty reading signs and markings, and 3) require more time to adjust to glare of the sun in the daytime or bright headlights at night.

Cognition includes memory as well as thinking, use of sensory perception, attention, learning, thought, visual processing, reading, and problem solving. The complex activity of driving may require the use of all these cognitive skills, which when diminished may result in: 1) distraction or disorientation when driving, 2) problems maintaining control of the car for long periods or long distances, 3) slower response time for traffic signs and signals, 4) delayed reaction in responding to positions of other vehicles, 5) trouble recognizing and safely responding to pedestrians and bicyclists, 6) problems properly operating controls of the car, such as the brake and gas pedal, 7) difficulty planning and navigating a driving route, and 8) becoming lost, confused, or unable to navigate from one location to another.

Dementia is a decline of cognition due to loss or damage to nerve cells in the brain that can affect many critical abilities needed to drive safely. These abilities include: 1) perception and visual processing, 2) maintaining attention, 3) responding to multi stimuli, and 4) making correct decisions and acting appropriately in difficult traffic situations. Although people in the early stages of dementia may be able to operate a vehicle safely, they may have difficulty as dementia progresses, and may even become lost when driving. Indicators that might help determine the need for a dementia evaluation include: scores from simple dementia screening tools, recent crashes or moving violations, prescriptions for memory problems, a recent history of falls, or the person is 80 years or older.

Physical Condition often changes with aging due to the loss of muscle mass and bone strength, both of which increase the chances of injury or death in the event of a crash. In fact, drivers age 65 and older are four times more likely to sustain serious injuries compared to drivers under 24 years of age. Sensory issues in hands and feet that affect driving might include: 1) tingling, numbness, and problems drivers might experience in knowing where they are positioned in the car and/or keeping consistent pressure on the pedals with legs and feet, 2) numbness that affects the ability to feel or grasp, both of which can make it difficult to keep a firm grip on the steering wheel. The physical condition of an older adult might also result in decreased flexibility that might cause rigidity or limited range of motion in the neck, arms, legs, torso, or joints. Additionally, vertigo, dizziness, or loss of balance might occur along with muscle spasms or tremors that could result in loss of control of the vehicle.

Medications also can present challenges that impact the areas described.

OTHERS WILL FACE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Many years ago there was a song about a little old lady who was a granny with a brand new, shiny red super stock Dodge parked in her garage. She drove real fast and real hard and was the terror of Colorado Boulevard. The little old lady may not be around any longer but there are a lot of women (and men) who are (or would like to be) like her.

Let's say that today the little old lady is 77, has diabetes, suffers from related vision challenges, and has mobility problems. She lives alone and her car (a bit older now) is critical to her life. Why? Because she can get to essential destinations such as the doctor, the dentist, the social service agency, grocery and shopping, and to what some would call nonessential destinations, such as the hairdresser, volunteer activities, visiting friends, and going to the bank.

Although she isn't ready to give up her keys, she is beginning to wonder if perhaps her "happiness on wheels" is too expensive to maintain. So let's take a look at what a car actually costs us. According to AAA, in 2019 the average price of a car was \$37,185. Cars typically depreciate 20% in the first year of ownership. So, a new car costing \$37,000 in 2019 will be worth approximately \$29,648 in 2020. Then, five years into ownership, depreciation rate slows down, so the car will maintain its value better moving forward, and taxes and finance charges will be lower. After owning a car for 10 years, there will most likely be savings in comprehensive and collision insurance and finance charges for auto loans. However, maintenance costs will likely be higher in year 10 of ownership. The accompanying chart of AAA data indicates the annual costs of car ownership for several different vehicles. As you can see, in 2018, the average cost to own and operate a vehicle is \$8,469 annually, or \$706 each month.

And, now if you want to get a general handle of your own cost of ownership, perhaps the 10-step process below will be helpful.

AAA 2018 Data on Annual Car Ownership

Small Sedan	\$6,354
Small SUV	\$7,606
Hybrid	\$7,687
Medium Sedan	\$8,171
Electric Vehicle	\$8,439
Minivan	\$9,146
Large Sedan	\$9,399
Medium SUV	\$9,451

HYPOTHETICAL METHOD OF FIGURING THE COST OF CAR OWNERSHIP

- Step 1:** determine how many miles you will drive each year
- Step 2:** identify how much you actually paid for your car
- Step 3:** determine number of years you will own your car
- Step 4:** divide cash you paid for your car by 3 years
- Step 5:** calculate depreciation of your car based on Step 2
- Step 6:** determine your annual auto insurance premium
- Step 7:** determine all taxes and fees
- Step 8:** determine annual costs for fuel
- Step 9:** determine annual maintenance and repair for your car
- Step 10:** determine your car's resale value

THE MORAL TO THIS STORY

The cost of the little old lady's car may or may not be a good reason to give up her keys. However, as we all know, owning and driving a car isn't only about money. It's also about freedom, independence, and control as well as being able to drive and being a good driver!

SOME INDICATORS OF UNSAFE DRIVING

Older adults (actually all drivers) should be aware of the following signs that they may not be driving safely:

- frequent honking by other drivers
- scrapes or dents on the car, mailbox, or garage
- bad judgment when making left-hand turns
- delayed response to unexpected situation
- improper turns and improper passing
- confusing the gas and brake pedals

People who experience these and other indicators of unsafe driving may want to consider taking a driving test, limiting their driving, or stopping to drive altogether.

DRIVING SAFELY CAN HELP EXTEND ONE'S LIFE OF DRIVING

It seems that every day we read or hear about car crashes or near misses. If an older driver is involved, there often is a comment about age being a factor, when in fact it may not be age-related at all. Yes, there is evidence that people may outlive their driving expectancy, but many people continue driving safely well into their 80's and 90's. The following are safety tips recommended by insurance companies that can contribute to safe driving by older adults and actually by people of all ages.

- Avoid driving at night if you have trouble with your vision.
- Don't tint your windows.
- Avoid driving during periods of high traffic, especially during commute times.
- Drive on familiar streets and limit trips to streets close to home.
- Keep your headlights on at all times.
- Always wear your seat belt.
- Limit distractions while driving (radio noise, conversations, cell phones, eating).
- Stay alert, listen for sirens, and watch for flashing lights of emergency vehicles.
- Keep a safe distance between you and the car ahead so you have ample time to brake safely if necessary. (This is sometimes referred to as a space cushion.)
- Get periodic vision and hearing tests.
- Get hearing aids and new glasses when needed.
- Carefully read medication labels to see if they might impair driving skills.
- Talk with your doctor if you have concerns about continuing to drive.
- Take a defensive driving course.
- Use transportation options other than driving your car if you're unsure of your ability to drive safely.