

February 2023

Traffic Safety Newsletter

Senior Driving Safety



Though we may not want to think about it, we are all aging. Aging can affect driving habits and abilities. This is something that we all need to consider, not only for ourselves, but for aging family members and friends, as well. In 2020 there were 55.7 million people—17% of the total U.S. population—who were 65 and older. In 2020, there were 26% more people killed in crashes involving older drivers compared to 2011: from 5,636 in 2011 to 7,110 in 2020.

In Delaware:

- There were 4,746 crashes involving seniors in 2022.
- There were 36 senior fatalities in 2022.
- The main cause of fatal crashes for seniors in 2022 was failure to yield the right of way, which accounted for 25% of all fatal crashes involving a senior driver.

Throughout this edition of the Traffic Safety Newsletter, we will explore why the older population is particularly at-risk while behind the wheel, some safety tips for older drivers, and warning signs that family members and caregivers should be looking out for.

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Why Older Drivers Are At Risk

OLDER DRIVER SAFETY TIP

Some medications
may affect the
ability to drive.



Our bodies are constantly changing. Something that we must all consider is how these changes are affecting our ability to drive.

According to the [Delaware Division of Motor Vehicles](#):

- At age 40, mental sharpness begins to diminish, thought processing slows, multitasking is more challenging, night vision worsens, and recovery from glare is reduced.
- At age 50, 9 in 10 people require glasses, and reaction time slows.
 - Changes in eyesight may make it hard to see objects as you are driving and cause you to take longer to read street signs.
- At age 60, muscle strength and range of motion decrease by as much as 25%.
 - Conditions, such as arthritis, may make joints stiff, which can limit the ability to properly brake, turn the steering wheel quickly, or turn the head to look for traffic.
- At age 70, arthritic joints make movement painful and restrict mobility, and conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, hypertension, dementia, Alzheimer's Disease, and diabetes may affect perception and behavior.

In addition to the natural effects of aging, many drivers take medication. Older drivers are more likely to be taking multiple

medications. Whether these medications are prescription or over the counter, they may have side effects that alter the ability to drive. Always read labels on medications to see what possible side effects may occur. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe for you to operate a vehicle while on particular medications.

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Tips for Older Drivers



OLDER DRIVER SAFETY TIP



When the sun goes down early, driving may become more challenging at night.

If older drivers are heading out on the road, it is important to make a plan for the drive. Take familiar routes to reduce the risk of getting lost or disoriented. Plan to drive during the day, if possible, so the roadways are well lit and visibility is increased. If you have trouble seeing at night and need to go somewhere, try to get a ride from a friend or family member or use public transportation/ride share services. If you need glasses to see to drive, make sure your prescription is up to date. If you need hearing aids, always wear them while driving so you can hear traffic and emergency signals around you.

While driving a vehicle, limit distractions so you can be completely focused on the drive. Wear your seat belt for every ride, no matter the length of the trip. Take time to consider the vehicle that you

are driving. Does the vehicle fit all of your needs or can adjustments be made? Older drivers can participate in CarFit. **CarFit** is an educational program that offers older adults the opportunity to check how well their personal vehicles "fit" them.

It is always important to check in with yourself. If you are not feeling well or are having an "off" day, ask yourself if you should be driving that day. When in doubt, don't go out. If you want to check in on your driving skills in general, the Delaware DMV has created a self-assessment to compare your current driving abilities with the requirements for safe driving. Assess yourself today by clicking on the button below.

**Take the Self
Assessment**

For Family and Caregivers



There are no age limitations on drivers licenses in Delaware. While you may know your family members and their driving habits, it is also important that you recognize the warning signs of unsafe driving and know how to cope with aging drivers. Start the conversation about aging driving early. Have a plan in place with your family member for when they may need to reassess their driving skills and abilities. Make sure you follow through with that plan.

Some warning signs of hazardous drivers include, but are not limited to,

- Difficulty negotiating sharp turns and intersections.
- Becoming lost on familiar routes.
- Feeling nervous or exhausted after driving.
- Difficulty merging onto freeways or turning onto busy streets.
- Finding scrapes and dents on vehicles, mailboxes, and other

- stationary objects.
- Hesitation over right-of-way decisions.

If you need to have a difficult conversation with an aging driver in your life, remember to approach the situation with a positive attitude. Having to give up driving signifies a loss of independence. The older driver may be angry or upset. Explain to the driver that you are concerned for the safety of themselves and others around them. Offer ways to help improve their driving, if possible. Be supportive by finding alternate methods of transportation. If talking with your aging driver does not work, immediate family members, doctors, and law enforcement are able to request a driver re-examination from the DMV. To access the Driver Re-Examination Request form, click the button below.

**Driver Re-Examination
Request**

Thank You

The Delaware Office of Highway Safety would like to extend our gratitude and thanks to all of our corporate partners!

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