

For information on
AAA's Safe Driving
for Mature Operators
Driver Improvement Program,
contact your local AAA club.

STRAIGHT TALK for **Mature Drivers**

AAA's Mature Drivers series:

- ▼ Meeting the Challenge
- ▼ Buying a Vehicle
- ▼ Good Vision ...
Vital to Good Driving
- ▼ Maintaining Your Vehicle
- ▼ Rx for Safe Driving

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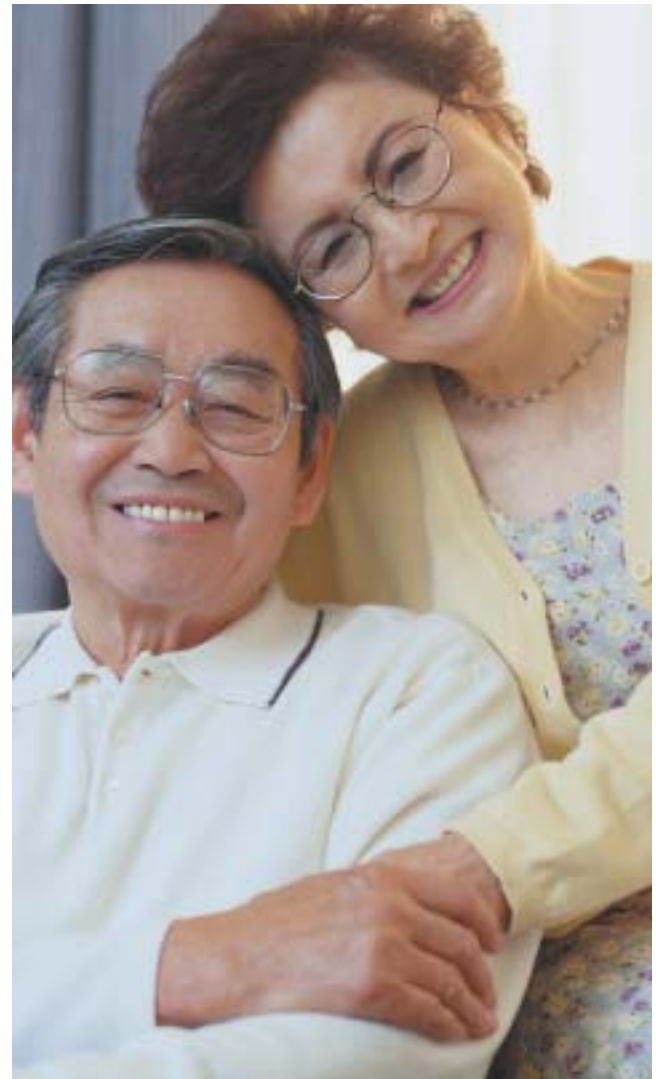
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STRAIGHT TALK for **Mature Drivers**

**Good Vision ...
Vital to Good Driving**



Keeping Safety in Sight

Aging takes its toll on reflexes, memory, attention and, perhaps most dramatically, eyesight. Seniors are less able to detect fine detail and objects against low-contrast backgrounds. This can make it harder for mature drivers to be safe drivers.

By age 65, few people have perfect vision. The pupil grows smaller, and the lens of the eye becomes more opaque. These changes reduce the amount of light available to the retina. Although individuals vary greatly, the average 75-year-old needs about three times more light than a 25-year-old to see the same objects.

Seniors also have trouble shifting focus quickly, and their eyes take longer to recover from glare.

We can't turn back the clock, but we can get frequent eye exams, wear corrective lenses, limit nighttime driving, select vehicles with the best visibility and plan responsibly. Learning to cope with changing vision keeps everyone safer on the road.



Changes to Expect

Aging can cause a decline in the ability to:

- ▼ Judge the speed of oncoming vehicles.
- ▼ Notice objects at the outer edges of your field of view.
- ▼ Shift focus to objects and identify them.
- ▼ Perceive detail and differences in color and contrast.
- ▼ Accurately judge the distance to an object.
- ▼ Detect motor vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians on or beside the road.
- ▼ Recognize objects in low-light conditions such as dawn, dusk, rain, fog, haze or snow.

Bright Ideas for Safer Driving

- ▼ Avoid driving at dawn, dusk, after dark and in bad weather.
- ▼ Avoid driving when tired or stressed.
- ▼ Do not drive when taking medication that could impair your vision or cause drowsiness. This includes over-the-counter medications and herbal supplements.
- ▼ Avoid rush-hour traffic and congested roads and intersections.
- ▼ Watch for pedestrians or bicyclists who may not see you.

We can't turn back the clock, but we can get frequent eye exams, wear corrective lenses and plan responsibly.

Tips for Driving Safely

The safest mature drivers:

- ▼ Use extra caution when slowing, entering or exiting the roadway and when turning or backing.
- ▼ Keep their eyes moving to scan the roadway from shoulder to shoulder to avoid highway hypnosis.
- ▼ Avoid driving more than one hour past their usual bedtime.
- ▼ Choose routes that are familiar, well-lit and lightly traveled.
- ▼ Use high beams when no one is in front of them or approaching.
- ▼ Drive with low beams during the day, especially on two-lane roads.
- ▼ Make an extra effort to always use turn signals, to alert other drivers of their intentions well in advance of a turn.
- ▼ Keep headlights, taillights, windshield and windows clean inside and outside.
- ▼ Adjust mirrors and seats to optimize visibility.
- ▼ Always wear their seat belt, and require all passengers in their vehicle to do the same.
- ▼ Avoid making left turns whenever possible. Instead, they drive one block past their destination and make three right turns.
- ▼ Make a daytime rehearsal run to unfamiliar locations they must reach after dark.
- ▼ Take a defensive driving or driver improvement course such as AAA's *Safe Driving for Mature Operators*.



Having your eyes checked regularly and taking driver improvement courses to assess your skills will help you stay on the road — safely — for as long as possible.

When is it Time to Stop Driving at Night?

- ▼ Other people seem to see better at night than you do.
- ▼ You keep thinking the windshield or your glasses are dirty, even though you just cleaned them.
- ▼ You have a hard time adjusting to glare from headlights and tail lights of other cars.
- ▼ You have trouble seeing road signs, road markings, curbs or other roadside features.
- ▼ You see “halos” around lights, especially street lights.

If you have experienced any of these problems, see an eye doctor and limit your night driving.



'I Never Saw It Coming'

Too many times, drivers utter the above phrase after a traffic crash. The older you get, the greater the chance that you, too, won't see a problem on the road in time to avoid a crash.

Eye exams don't tell the whole story. These tests are done in an office setting with optimal lighting and a clear field of view. Reading road signs while driving on a busy highway is another story. The real challenge for mature eyes is processing information efficiently at low light levels and during high-speed movement.

In a typical city, a driver encounters as many as 200 situations per mile. The eyes provide nearly 90 percent of the information needed to respond to road conditions, traffic patterns, signs and signals. Spotting signs is largely a function of side vision. As you age, your side vision narrows, so it becomes easier to miss seeing road signs or pedestrians crossing the street.

For safer driving:

- ▼ Scan the roadway and shoulder/median areas 30 seconds ahead.
- ▼ At night, adjust your speed to the range of your headlights.
- ▼ Read signs by shape and color.
- ▼ Dim dash lights when driving after dark. Remove any light-colored or reflective materials from the dash.
- ▼ To cope with glare, adjust the rearview mirror to the night setting.
- ▼ As vehicles approach at night, look toward the right side of the road.
- ▼ Keep a flashlight on hand to read signs and house numbers when driving after dark.

Correcting Vision

To ensure your vision is the best it can possibly be:

- ▼ Get an annual eye exam, including checks for glaucoma and cataracts.
- ▼ Update prescriptions for glasses or contact lenses regularly.
- ▼ Choose glasses with thin frames and high-mounted side pieces for the best peripheral vision.
- ▼ Keep glasses or contact lenses clean and in good repair.
- ▼ Choose lightly tinted polarizing sunglasses or prescription sunglasses.



What's Being Done to Help?

In recent years, automakers have introduced many safety features to help drivers of all ages. Among them:

- ▼ Instrument panels with larger symbols and adjustable lighting.
- ▼ Automatic dimming rearview mirrors to reduce headlight glare.
- ▼ Rear-window wipers.
- ▼ Blind spot-reducing mirrors and doors.

Many changes also have been made to roads and signage to improve safety, such as:

- ▼ Wider, more reflective pavement markers to delineate lanes clearly at night and in bad weather.
- ▼ Raised pavement markers that reflect headlight beams.
- ▼ Larger, brighter letters and symbols on traffic signs with more contrast between figures and backgrounds.
- ▼ Better lighting on city streets and highways.
- ▼ Left-turn lanes with traffic signals.
- ▼ Larger traffic-signal heads and “all red” periods to allow a margin of error at intersections.

You also can help other drivers see better at night by asking your mechanic to make sure your headlights are properly positioned. Headlight glare is often caused by improperly positioned headlights.

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Age-Related Vision Problems

Your overall health can affect your vision at any age. Vision problems associated with age include cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and side effects related to other diseases or medication.

A cataract is a cloudiness or opacity in the normally transparent lens of the eye. Much like a fogged-over window, a cataract can prevent an individual from seeing clearly.

Glaucoma is caused when the eye's pressure is too high. If untreated, this disease can cause vision loss and blindness.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of legal blindness in people over age 55. Vision loss usually occurs gradually and typically affects both eyes at different rates.

Eyes are also affected by other diseases such as diabetes. Long-standing diabetes can cause bleeding in the eye, resulting in blindness. Diabetics are more likely to develop cataracts in their 40s or 50s.

Many people don't realize they have a cataract or other medical condition that impairs vision. That's why it's vitally important to have your eyes examined regularly — at least once a year.

If you recently have been diagnosed with a chronic disease or have been acutely ill, remember to get your vision checked and ask your eye care professional about how the illness or medications may affect your vision and driving skills.



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