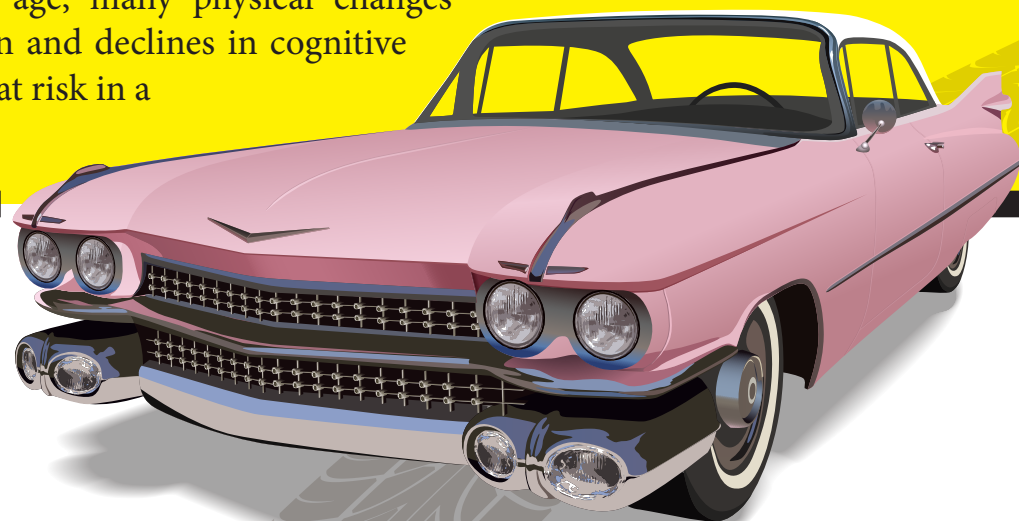


# Helping Older Adult Drivers Prevent Accidents

Older adult drivers contribute many positive attributes to daily driving tasks. Their accumulated driving experience, ability to think critically, and aptitude for controlling impulses and managing their emotions gives them a distinct advantage over younger, inexperienced drivers. In addition, older adult drivers are more willing to wear seat belts, tend to drive when conditions are safe — such as during daytime hours and in good weather, and have a lower incidence of impaired driving due to alcohol consumption. However, the reality of being an older adult driver is that as their bodies' age, many physical changes begin to occur. Decreased vision and declines in cognitive and motor skills often put them at risk in a multitude of driving situations.



The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports, “In 2008, 13 percent of the total U.S. resident population (34 million) were people aged 65 and older. In 2008, 183,000 older individuals were injured in traffic crashes, accounting for 8 percent of all the people injured in traffic crashes during the year. These older individuals made up 15 percent of all traffic fatalities, 14 percent of all vehicle occupant fatalities, and 18 percent of all pedestrian fatalities.” In addition, “Most traffic fatalities involving older drivers in 2008 occurred during the daytime (80%), occurred on weekdays (72%) and involved other vehicles (69%).”

Christian Brothers Risk Management Services recently conducted more than 2,500 evaluations of older adult drivers. The data gathered from these evaluations revealed that there is a significant difference in an individual's ability to drive safe as a driver ages from 65-80 years of age. Studies conducted by

the NHTSA confirm this finding and place older adult drivers into three age categories: 60-69, 70-79 and 80-plus. The increasing age of the driver has a great impact on whether or not they will become involved in an accident. To better understand this probability, the NHTSA uses a measurement tool called the Crash Involvement Ratio, or CIR. This is an induced exposure analyses measurement that determines the ratio of at-fault to not-at-fault drivers. Values lower than 1.0 indicate lower than average rates of at-fault crashes, and higher than 1.0 represent higher at-fault rates. Drivers aged 60-69 scored 0.75, which means they have a below average risk of being found at

fault in a crash. However, the risk increases to 1.75 for drivers aged 70-79, and 4.0 for drivers aged 80 and older.

In the publication *Identifying Behaviors and Situations Associated With Increased Crash Risk for Older Drivers*, the NHTSA provides further analysis of the types of accidents older drivers encounter. Drivers aged 60-69 had crash rates similar to those of middle-aged drivers under most conditions, although their crash risk was elevated during daylight hours and at intersections. In general, left turns become more risky for drivers aged 60 and older. In most cases, these drivers were more

likely to be the vehicle that was struck during an accident, to be involved in angle crashes, and to have received citations for failure to yield. In addition, in single-vehicle crashes, drivers 60 and older were more likely to have been alone in the vehicle, and were less likely to have made a maneuver to avoid the collision.

Drivers 70 and older had elevated risk levels in these and additional environmental conditions, such as driveways, alleys, and at intersections controlled by stop or yield signs.

Drivers 80 and older differed from those aged 70 to 79. For these drivers, the risk of an accident increased in conditions that required navigating complex situations such as intersections, left turns and reacting to an imminent crash.

Additional factors for older adult drivers becoming involved in accidents are attributed to being ill or blacking out, drowsy or asleep, and using medications or drugs (other than alcohol).

To help older adult drivers prevent accidents and stay sharp while behind the wheel, Christian Brothers Risk Management Services recommends conducting behind-the-wheel driver evaluations for drivers aged 75 and older. As a result of performing these evaluations and then combining them with driver awareness training, accidents

experienced by older drivers within the religious community have decreased, along with related claims expense.

It is critical for religious communities to develop an older adult driver policy that is approved and enforced by its members. A leadership team should be appointed to implement and enforce the policy. Items to incorporate into this policy include:

- ▶ Policy enforcement.
- ▶ Driver awareness training programs and schedule.
- ▶ A definition of behind-the-wheel evaluations, including who will be evaluated and when.
- ▶ Methods for monitoring drivers and subsequent claims/losses.
- ▶ Resources for alternative forms of transportation for drivers who have given up driving.

Additional prevention techniques, suggested by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), that older adult drivers can practice to stay mentally and physically fit for driving include:

- ▶ Exercise regularly to increase strength and flexibility.
- ▶ Ask a doctor or pharmacist to review medication — both prescription and over-the-counter — to reduce side-effects and drug interactions.
- ▶ Visit the eye doctor for an eye exam at least once a year. Wear glasses and corrective lenses as required.

- ▶ Drive during daylight hours and in good weather conditions. Find the safest route with well-lit streets, intersections with left turn arrows, and easy parking. Plan out the route before driving.
- ▶ Leave a large following distance behind the car in front of you. Remember the four second rule if you are driving a car, increase it to five seconds for vans and add an additional second for adverse weather or road conditions.
- ▶ Avoid distractions in the vehicle such as listening to a loud radio, talking on the cell phone, texting and eating.
- ▶ Think about potential alternatives to driving, such as riding with a friend or using public transportation.

Other resources: *Online Driver Screening Tool* by AAA can be found at: <http://seniordrivers.org/driving/driving.cfm?button=roadwiseonline>.

*Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers* can be found at: [nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/older\\_drivers/pdf/811298.pdf](http://nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/older_drivers/pdf/811298.pdf).

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