

## Elderly Drivers - Stop or Go?

*Elderly drivers are involved in accidents at a rate paralleling those of teenagers. Here are a few tips to help you help your elderly driver or keep him off the road.*

([PRWEB](#)) April 1, 2004 -- Without so much as a tap on the brakes, my 87-year-old aunt whizzed through another stop sign.

"That was a stop sign," I shrieked.

"Oh," she replied rather offhandedly, "they just put those there so you'll look before you go into an intersection."

That was the day I stopped riding with her but not the day she stopped driving. From then on, I had visions of an enormous pink Chevy leading a parade of cascading accidents. I wasn't far from wrong.

She drove with what she knew to be the utmost caution . . . never exceeding 30 miles an hour, even on the interstate. She expected, even demanded, that traffic give way to her like the seas parted for Moses. Sometimes, it did. But mostly, being on the road with her was a harrowing experience with only disaster in sight.

So, when do the elderly become a menace on the roads? And, what can you do if they refuse to give up the keys? Here are a few suggestions.

### Causes for Concern

Â· Poor Vision - Cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration can reduce visual acuity and limit visual fields, so a yearly eye exam is important for elderly drivers. Ask the doctor about driving, and don't take the word of the elderly driver on the results of her exam.

Â· Poor Hearing - Something as simple as a clogged ear passage can create hearing loss. A doctor can identify the problem and offer solutions.

Â· Poor Flexibility and Limited Range of Motion - When a driver lacks the ability to turn his head and shoulders to look outside, he may not see oncoming vehicles or obstacles traveling in the car's blind spot.

Â· Slower Reaction Time - As we age, reaction times drop. Keeping extra space between the driver's and other cars can help reduce the likelihood of accidents, but there comes a time when reactions are too slow for road safety.

### Get (and Keep) the Keys

A few states, require road or vision tests for people over 65 on license renewal. Consider yourself fortunate if you live in one of these states because the state may refuse to renew the elder's license. Otherwise, try the following.

Â· Talk with your elder about the convenience of mass transit - Many mass transit authorities have special services and fares for elderly and disabled. Check with your local transit authority. Remind your elder how nice it is to be able to enjoy the scenery while someone else does the driving.



• Give your elder a refresher course - Not only will a refresher course improve road awareness, your elder might earn a discount on his car insurance. Courses and informative pamphlets are available from the AARP, AAA, and the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

• Report unsafe driving to your local Department of Public Safety. They may have more help to offer you.

• "Break" the car - My teenagers unplugged a few vital wires when my father, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, refused to give up the keys. We knew his cognitive ability was far too damaged for him to recognize the problem, but he was comforted when we said we'd have the car repaired "soon."

• Lose the keys - Distract your elder from finding "lost" keys by offering an immediate alternative way to go somewhere. Remember you are protecting not only him but all the rest of us as well.

What happened to my aunt? She got a ticket from a traffic officer whom we blessed daily! Fearing the loss of her auto insurance, she voluntarily gave up driving.

#### Web Resources

Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully is a free booklet you can read online.

AARP offers a refresher course for elderly drivers as well as other helpful resources at <http://www.aarp.org/55alive/>.

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, [seniordrivers.org](http://seniordrivers.org)

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Don't miss the launch of the 2nd edition of How to Find Great Senior Housing. Buy a copy April 15, 2004, and receive bonus gifts worth more than \$230.00. Full details on our website (<http://www.thebestisyet.net>) April 14th.

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