

## Driving safely as you age



### Meet Linda...

Linda is 69 years old. She has started to notice difficulties with her vision when driving, especially at night. Linda also feels she has slower responses in driving situations and has less confidence in unfamiliar or busy environments. Last month, Linda's husband had a stroke and can no longer drive, making Linda the main driver in the family. Linda has been asking herself:

### What can I do to continue to be a safe driver?

There are roughly 2.7 million drivers over the age of 65 on Canadian roads today. By 2040 there will be almost double the number of older drivers in Canada.



### How might age affect safe driving?

Age alone does not determine a person's ability to remain a safe driver. Many older adults continue to be safe drivers and make decisions to avoid driving situations in which they feel less confident. However, as you age, changes in your abilities make some activities more difficult. It is important to recognize changes that can affect your ability to drive safely. For example:

- **Vision:** You may begin to notice glare and find it more difficult to see in the dark, scan the environment, or see things in your peripheral vision.
- **Physical:** You may feel weaker, stiff, experience pain or move more slowly.
- **Cognition:** You may have more difficulty remembering things, making decisions or doing activities when there are distractions.
- **Reaction Time:** You may find it more difficult to react quickly in different situations.





## Warning signs of unsafe driving

- You lose your way.
- You have less confidence in your driving skills.
- You notice other drivers honk at you.
- You miss stop signs or traffic lights.
- You mix up gas and brake pedals.
- You have problems with lane changes or merging.
- You have minor accidents or traffic tickets.
- Your passenger needs to help you.
- Family and friends refuse to get in the car with you.

If these warning signs reflect your situation, maybe it is time to make some changes to your driving strategies or have your driving evaluated.



## Safe driving strategies

All drivers find themselves in driving situations that are risky. Here are some strategies that can be used to reduce the risk:

### General strategies

- choose a vehicle that is easier to drive, such as one with automatic transmission or power options such as adjustable seats
- make sure your vehicle is in good working condition
- make sure your seat, steering wheel and mirror are properly adjusted

- limit driving at night, in bad weather, during rush hour or on limited access highways
- be careful when changing lanes, making a left-hand turn or merging into traffic
- maintain a safe following distance
- take breaks if you are driving a long distance
- have regular medical checkups
- make sure you know how your medications might affect your ability to drive safely

### Getting help

- an occupational therapist or a certified driver rehabilitation specialist can evaluate your driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, or help you find alternative transportation
- a driver information session or refresher course may be useful for your driving





## Driving retirement

There may come a time when you no longer feel safe to drive or you may be told that you can no longer drive. Here are some strategies to help you get where you want to go:

- plan ahead: planning for driving retirement should begin before you stop driving
- make a personal transportation plan:
  - collect information on local transportation options
  - check the blue pages or the Internet for local or regional transportation service providers and for government or community services for older adults that may offer transportation services
- become familiar and comfortable with alternative transportation options

**Remember:** Never be afraid to ask for help from family or friends.

## Linda's decision

Linda still believes that she is a safe driver, but recognizes that there are some situations that are more risky than others. She has decided to avoid situations such as driving in heavy traffic, in bad weather and at night. She will also look for a driver information session in her community to learn more about safe driving.

### What strategies will you use?

Older drivers may recognize and avoid situations where they do not feel confident in their ability to drive safely. For example, they may avoid driving after dark in heavy traffic, or in bad weather.

## RESOURCES



**For more information**

[www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)

**Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists:** [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)

**American Occupational Therapy Association Older Drivers:** [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)

**Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists:** [www.aded.net](http://www.aded.net)

**Canadian Automobile Association:** [www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca)

**Public Health Agency of Canada:** [www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors](http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors)

**Seniors Canada:** [www.seniors.gc.ca](http://www.seniors.gc.ca)

This information is also available in French, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Italian, and Punjabi.



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