

When is it time for Seniors to stop driving?

One of the most important concerns for cognitively impaired older adults is when to cease driving a vehicle due to a decline in driving skills that potentially place the person and others at risk.

Index

- Seniors have an increased risk of being in an accident
- Driving cessation has an impact on both the driver and caregiver
- Strategies for caregivers to follow
- Resource links & videos

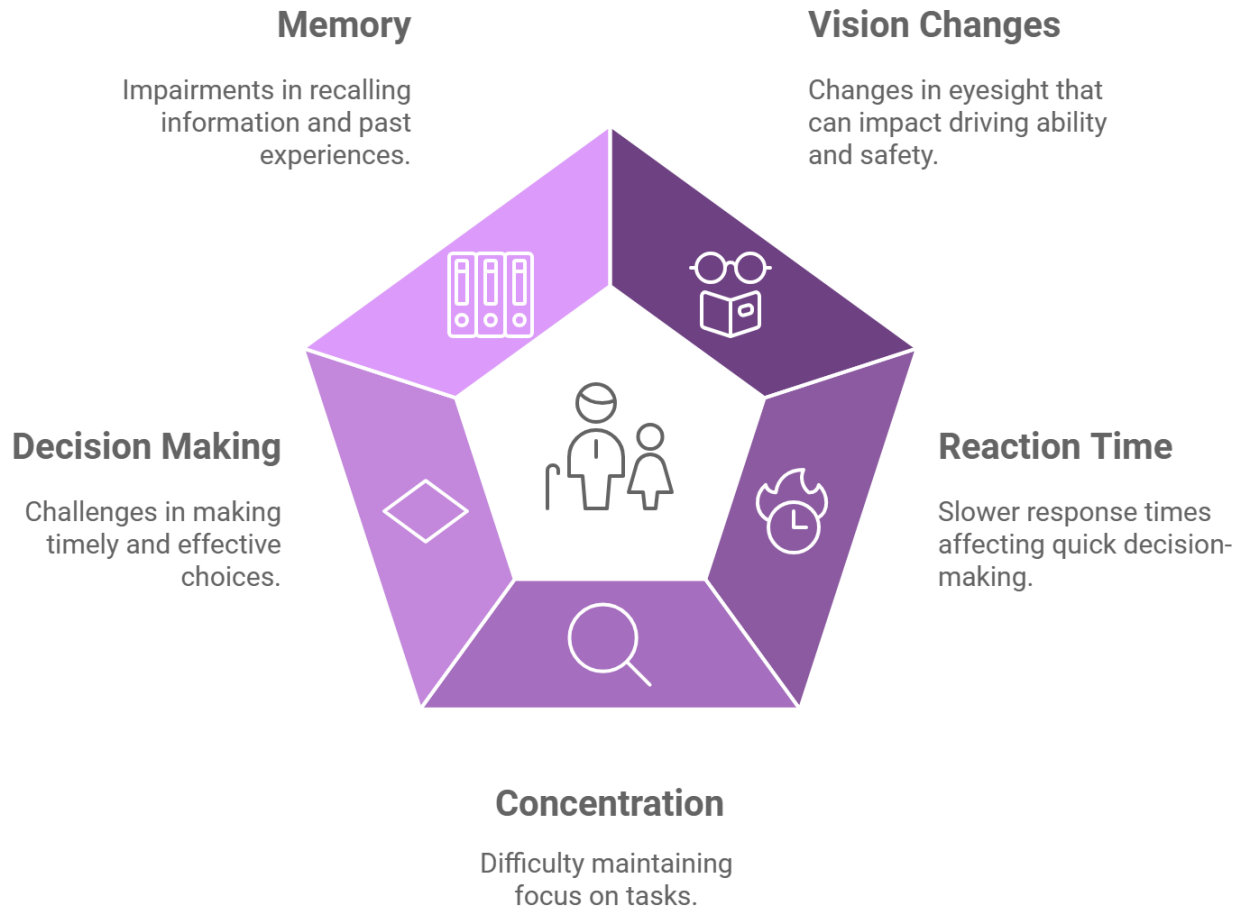
Seniors have an increased risk of being in an accident

Some of the changes that can happen as you age include: change of vision, reaction time, concentration, decision making, memory, and even flexibility and movement, which can affect safe operations of a motor vehicle.

And that's why, statistically, seniors do have an increased risk of being involved in a motor vehicle collision.

Studies show that as drivers approach their 80s they have a similar risk of being involved in a motor vehicle collision as that of a new driver.

Aging Effects on Safe Driving



Driving cessation has an impact on both the driver and caregiver

Families need to play a major role in assessing their relative's driving capabilities in the context of a progressive disease such as dementia. Family caregivers need to plan the best strategies for engaging their relative in discussions about driving cessation.

In addition, accessing the help of professional healthcare providers such as the family's doctor will add authority to discussions about assessment of driving ability and raise issues as to individual and public safety.

Most of the responsibility for driving cessation is assumed by the caregiver as they are the first to notice decline in driving skills yet are reluctant to share their observations with the cognitively impaired family member.

Driving cessation has an impact on both the driver and caregiver especially if both have relied on the driver for transportation, food shopping, doctors appointments, social gatherings etc. Consequently, the caregiver needs to obtain support from family members and professionals in achieving the goal of driving cessation for the cognitively impaired relative. Achieving the goal involves engaging the cognitively impaired relative and other family members in a planning process leading to a mutual decision to give up driving and accepting alternate forms of transportation.

Listed below are some strategies for caregivers to follow.

Recommended Strategies to Limit or Discontinue Driving (Perkinson et. al., 2005)

1. During the early stage of dementia begin to discuss with the cognitively impaired person and other family members the need to start thinking about limiting driving, and plans for discontinuing. Accompany the driver and observe whether the person is anxious and possibly aware of loss of some driving skills.
2. Engage family members in devising a plan for determining the cognitively impaired person's driving capabilities; for example, have them ride with the person to observe driving skills. Insure that all family members are on board and represent a united front in dealing with the necessity for driving cessation.
3. Enlist the help of your physician, local police, nurses, social workers or occupational therapists to convince the person to stop driving.

4. Provide the driver with concrete evidence of their struggles with safe driving by having them undergo a driving evaluation at your local motor vehicle driving authority.
5. Have your doctor write a letter stating that the person should not drive.
6. Make plans with the cognitively impaired person as to how he/she will manage transportation without driving a car. Arrange alternate transportation; family members, buses, taxis etc.
7. Depending on the stage of the disease, the person may insist on driving and deny any problems. Then it may be necessary to remove the keys, license and automobile.
8. Driving cessation is often accompanied by depression due to the loss of function and self-esteem. Consequently it is important that the cognitively impaired person be involved in making plans for driving cessation at the very early stage of the disease. The more involved the person is in making the decision the more likely that the transition from being in control of driving to being driven can be achieved with minimal conflict.

Perkinson, M.A., Berg-Weger, M.L., Carr, D.B., Meuser, T.M. et al., (2005). Driving and Dementia of the Alzheimer Type: Beliefs and Cessation Strategies Among Stakeholders. *The Gerontologist*, 45, 676-685.

You should not rely on information tools for medical, financial or legal advice. It provides general information only. NICE is not responsible for any use of the information other than for general educational/informational purposes and no claim can be made against NICE or any of its personnel for any such use.

Last Updated: December 4, 2024

NICE - National Initiative for Care of the Elderly

www.nicenet.ca