

Church Name

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ASSISTING OLDER ADULTS WITH TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION

The ability to drive a car provides a significant amount of independence to the older adult and losing that independence is a major loss. The need to rely on others for transportation, however willing friends and family may be, is a blow to the self-esteem of the older adult. A great deal of tact and understanding are needed when assisting the older adult to transition from driving to not driving.

These aging changes can make driving increasingly difficult and unsafe for older adults:

- Older eyes are more sensitive to bright lights and to glare, such as from oncoming traffic on a sunny day, or from the snow in the winter.
- Decreases in depth perception make maneuvers such as left turns difficult.
- Decreases in peripheral vision may lead to errors in yielding the right-of-way
- Decreased ability to focus the eye makes judging distances and speed of oncoming vehicles more difficult.
- Conditions such as glaucoma, macular degeneration, and cataracts impair the vision of older adults and make driving difficult.
- Some medications may cause blurring of vision or other effects that impair vision and that reduce levels of awareness.
- Older adults lose flexibility and range of motion in the neck, making it hard to see vehicles around them.
- Decreased reaction times.

The decision to stop driving should be determined not by age but by ability since aging changes come at different times for different older adults. Sometimes the older adult decides on his/her own that he/she no longer feels safe driving, but in other cases, someone else must make the decision for the older adult. If needed, the physician can help at this point.

Tips to help you decide if/when to take the car away from Mom or Dad:

- Ride in the car while the older adult drives and observe his/her performance. Talk to him/her afterwards about what you observed. If you feel his/her driving is getting unsafe, point out safety infractions and make your appeal based on the safety argument: "Mom, I know it would be devastating for you if you hit someone and injured or killed him/her."
- Consider whether limiting their driving will temporarily solve the problem and help ease him/her out of driving. To do this:
 - Identify "safe routes" to the older adult's favorite places that avoid freeways and busy intersections and don't involve difficult maneuvers like merges or left turns.
 - Limit the older adult's driving to daytime hours. (A graduated license that excludes night-time driving may result in an insurance discount.)
 - Suggest that he/she does not drive in the winter until streets are completely clear.
 - Suggest he/she drives with a passenger to help with right-of-way decisions.
 - Remind the older adult to increase the interval between his/her car and the preceding one to at least four seconds. (Start counting slowly when the car ahead passes an object; stop counting when your car passes the same object.) This interval is essential because of the older adult's reduced reaction time.

Suggest that the older adult take the older driver refresher class. The cost is low and completing the course gives them a discount on auto insurance. (AARP's 55Alive program: AARP.org/55alive) (OVER)

For a driving self-exam contact the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety: 1-800-305-7233 or the National Safety Council: 1-800-621-6244.)

What about older adults with memory impairment, dementia or Alzheimer's disease?

Although older adults in the early stages of dementia may retain the ability to drive, the time will come, probably "sooner rather than later", when continuing to drive is no longer safe for him/her or others. Older adults with memory impairments lose their ability to see other ways of doing things and to judge the consequences of their actions.

Affirmative answers to any of these questions indicate that the memory impaired older adult should give up driving:

- Does the older adult become easily angered or confused while driving?
- Does the older adult drive at speeds appropriate for weather and road conditions?
- Are familiar places becoming difficult to locate?
- Does the older adult driver fail to observe traffic signals?
- Does the older adult driver rely on instructions from passengers?
- Have you noticed scrapes or dents on the older adult's car, garage, or mailbox?

Tips for making driving easier for the older adult who retains the ability to drive:

- Providing a seat cushion to raise him/her in the seat if necessary.
- Adding small blind spot mirrors onto side mirrors

Be sure that the older adult has had a recent vision check by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Tips for easing the older adult's transition to not driving:

Introduce services for the older adult to make him/her less car-dependent, such as:

- Arranged transportation
- Shuttle services
- Free deliveries (check the older adult's pharmacy or grocery store to see if they deliver at no cost.)

Because of mobility impairments, getting from place to place becomes progressively difficult for older adults. (Refer to **Tip Sheet on Transferring** for help transferring the older adult into a car.)

Tips for wheeling the older adult out of doors:

- When wheeling an older adult down ramps, go backwards, keeping your body between the wheelchair and the lower end of the ramp and your legs bent.
- When going up curbs, wheel as close to the edge of the curb as possible; make use of tip bars at the back of the wheelchair to tip the front wheels onto the curb. Bending your legs, not your back, lift the rear wheels onto the curb.
- When going down curbs, go backwards. Step down and lower rear wheels first, bracing the wheelchair against your body; use tip bars to gradually lower front wheels.

Transportation Resources:

- Store to Door: www.storetodoor.org. A grocery and prescription delivery service to disabled and aging adults: 651-642-1892. (Subsidized delivery fees are available, depending on customer income.)
- American Red Cross Transportation Services: 651-291-6790
- DARTS: Dakota County Transportation Services: 651-602-1180
- Metro Mobility: 651-602-1111 (Low cost transportation services are available for qualified older adults.)
- Medivan: 1-800-422-0976
- Fairview Senior and Disabled Transportation (to Fairview facilities or clinics): 612-672-7685

Contact the Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging for more transportation resources: 651-641-8612. Also, the Eldercare Locator (www.eldercare.org or 1-800-677-1116) can put caregivers in touch with many local resources.

Tip Sheets provided through the NOAH Project, a grant-funded project of the
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www.fcntc.org