



Becoming a safe senior driver



Safe driving begins with you.

Canadians are living longer, which explains why we're also driving longer. As the baby boomers retire, the number of senior drivers on the road will increase too. More experience is a good thing and so is awareness of some age-related changes that can affect driving skills.

Knowing what to expect can help you stay safe on the road.

CAA has used its decades of experience in road safety to provide tips and tools from our experts on how to stay safe behind the wheel, maintain confidence and modify driving habits when needed.



Table of contents.

Safe driving begins with you.	2
Take stock of your driving skills.	4
Make sense of physical changes.	6
R _x for safe driving.	8
Be aware and prepare.	10
Knowing when to stop starts with you.	12
What to expect when renewing your driver's licence.	15

For more in-depth information,
we invite you to visit
seniorsdriving.caa.ca

Take stock of your driving skills.

One of the most important things we can do to maintain driving independence is to regularly assess our driving skills and physical and mental abilities. Any driving skills that need improvement can be addressed with a refresher driving course, while physical and mental changes, once pinpointed, can be counteracted in order to continue driving safely.

Simple driving assessment.

This simple driving assessment can help you find areas that need improvement or driving habits that need to be changed.

Instructions: For each question, check the circle, triangle or square that best describes you.

1. I try to stay informed on changes in driving and highway laws and techniques.
2. Intersections bother me because there is so much to watch from all directions.
3. I find it difficult to decide when to merge with traffic on a busy highway.
4. I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations.
5. When I am really upset, it affects my driving.
6. My thoughts wander when I drive.

How to read your score: Count the number of squares, triangles and circles you checked off. In general, squares reflect unsafe driving that should



For a more complete assessment of your driving skills, visit seniorsdriving.caa.ca. If your answers on the complete test reveal areas you feel you can't improve on your own, talk to your doctor or a loved one about how you can make adjustments to your driving habits together.

**Always or
almost always**

Sometimes

**Never or
almost never**



be changed immediately. Triangles mean that driving can become unsafe if nothing is done to improve it. Circles indicate that you appear to be driving safely.

Make sense of physical changes.

Our physical and mental abilities change with age. Some of these changes – including our vision, hearing and ability to react quickly – can affect our driving. These changes generally happen very slowly, so it's important to evaluate them often to see if, or how, our driving ability is being affected.





Vision.

Having good vision is critical to driving safely. As we age, our pupils get smaller and don't dilate as much, so we tend to need more light to see clearly. It becomes harder to see objects in the dark, and glare from headlights become more bothersome.



Hearing.

Being unable to hear another driver honking or the high pitch of an emergency siren can lead to not reacting to a situation in time. The Canadian Hearing Society estimates that more than 60% of Canadians over the age of 65 have age-related hearing loss.



Motor skills and reaction time.

Our reaction time can slow down over time, making it harder to react to unexpected driving situations. Slower reaction times can be caused by diminishing motor skills – a side effect of common age-related diseases such as arthritis, or by our decreased ability to concentrate. Luckily, most difficulties of this type can be overcome by simple modifications to our vehicle or adjustments to our driving techniques.

R_x for safe driving.

We tend to take more medications to maintain our health as we get older. But these medications can sometimes affect our ability to drive safely by making us drowsy or dizzy, causing blurred vision, making it hard to concentrate, or even causing confusion. Not only that, it can take longer for our bodies to break down the medication.

Even commonly prescribed or over-the-counter medications can produce these potentially dangerous side effects. Always be sure to read the warning label and talk to a pharmacist or doctor about the effects your medications can have on your ability to drive. Understanding the risks and taking steps to ensure that you don't drive if affected by medication can keep the road safe for everyone on it.



Medication can
affect our ability
to drive safely.



Be aware and prepare.

Most of us just get into our cars and drive off without preparing properly. But not adjusting our mirrors, seat or steering wheel can lead to dangerous driving, which can be easily prevented by preparing in advance. CAA has developed a checklist to help ensure that your vehicle is ready for safe driving. Keep this pamphlet in your glove box and refer to it before you drive.

- **Make sure your body is positioned properly.** You should be sitting squarely behind the steering wheel, able to reach the accelerator and brake without lifting your foot from the floor.
- **Adjust the steering column.** The steering wheel should be tilted at an angle which allows you to have a clear view of the road,



an unobstructed view of the dashboard, good control of the wheel and optimal protection from the airbag.

- **Keep both hands on the steering wheel at all times.** Use the three o'clock and nine o'clock positions for better control, while minimizing the chance of injury if the airbag deploys.
- **Position your head restraint.** To absorb any impact, the head restraint should be positioned so your ear is at the middle of the cushion.
- **Adjust your rear-view and side-view mirrors.** Remember, properly adjusted mirrors will increase visibility but cannot eliminate all blind spots.
- **Adjust your seat belt.** Be sure it fits snugly across your hips and that there is no slack.



Knowing when to stop starts with you.

We all know that at some point we will have to limit, or even stop, driving on our own. Although there are steps we can take to continue driving safely, it is important to know our own limits, and make changes to our driving habits when warranted.

CAA has compiled a list of warnings that signal when driving skills might be declining.

Ask yourself:

- ***Have I been issued two or more traffic tickets or warnings in the past two years?*** Tickets can predict a greater risk for collision.
- ***Have I been involved in two or more collisions or “near-misses” in the past two years?*** Rear-end crashes, parking lot fender-benders and side collisions rank as the most common mishaps for drivers with diminishing skills, depth perception or reaction time.
- ***Do I have difficulty working the brake and gas pedals?*** A driver who lifts their leg to move between pedals, instead of keeping their heel on the floor and pressing with their toes, may have reduced vehicle control.
- ***Do I occasionally miss stop signs and other traffic signals?*** This may indicate difficulties with spotting road signs in a crowded, constantly moving visual field.

- ***Do I weave between or straddle lanes?***

Signaling incorrectly or not at all when changing lanes can be particularly dangerous, especially if there are challenges with checking mirrors or blind spots.

- ***Do other drivers honk or pass frequently, even when the traffic stream is moving relatively slowly?*** This may indicate difficulty keeping pace with fast-changing conditions.

- ***Do I get lost or disoriented easily, even in familiar places?*** This could indicate problems with working memory or early cognitive decline.

If you recognize one or more of the above warning signs, be sure to talk to a doctor. It is essential to know your limits and drive within them.





What to expect when renewing your driver's licence.

Starting at age 80, Ontario drivers must complete a group education course and pass a vision test every two years. Some drivers may also be required to pass a road test.

Here are the four main steps involved in renewing your licence:

- 1. Get a notice.** Approximately 90 days before your 80th birthday, you will receive a renewal form and a letter explaining how to renew your driver's licence.
- 2. Book an appointment.** You will need to attend a renewal session. When you call to book it, you'll receive a date, time and location for the session.
- 3. Attend a renewal session.** During this 90-minute session, you'll take a vision test, join others in a 45-minute interactive group education session, complete an in-class screening exercise, and undergo a driving record review. After the session, you may need to pass a road test or follow up with a physician and submit medical information.
- 4. Get a new driver's licence card.** After you finish the session and take the required tests, you will visit a ServiceOntario Centre to get your new driver's licence.

For more details, visit www.mto.gov.on.ca.

For more information on
senior driving, visit:

caaniagara.ca/seniordriving



NIAGARA

ROADSIDE
TRAVEL
INSURANCE
REWARDS

1-800-263-7272

This advice is intended to provide general information only and is not intended to provide legal or professional advice, or to be relied on in any dispute, claim, action, demand or proceeding. CAA Niagara does not accept liability for any damage or injury resulting from reliance on this information.