

Mature drivers and the effects of aging

MYTH – Older drivers are bad drivers.

FACT – A common misconception. In fact, age alone is not responsible for bad driving. Many older drivers remain competent drivers. The real issue is that physical and mental changes occur as we age and may interfere with our ability to drive safely.

Driving is a complex task that requires a driver's ability to:

- **see and hear** what's in the driving environment
- **think** or process complicated information quickly
- **do** by taking appropriate action to avoid crashes

Older drivers often take longer to complete each of these steps.

Your vision and hearing

What happens as we age?

- The retina becomes less sensitive to light. More light makes it easier to see and drive and older drivers require significantly more light than younger drivers.
- Our ability to change our focus starts to slow down around age 40. A driver over the age of 40 can take at least a second longer to refocus than a younger driver takes (such as when looking up from the dash to the road ahead).
- We become more sensitive to glare because the lenses of our eyes thicken and the pupils become smaller. A 55 year old takes eight times longer to recover from glare than a 16 year old.
- Peripheral vision narrows and depth perception declines as we age. Depth perception is important because we use it to judge how fast other cars are moving.
- Colours become more difficult to see – especially red, the colour of the brake lights of the car ahead that's braking.
- Hearing becomes less acute as we age. About one third of people over 65 and three quarters of those over 75 have hearing problems.

Driving and other effects of aging

Drivers have to make about 15 major decisions for each kilometre driven, each requiring almost immediate action. Today, there are more drivers on the road and decisions must be made faster and in a more congested traffic environment. Experience and mature judgement are important but **older drivers often process information more slowly.**

Once a decision has been made, the driver needs to react quickly. Testing shows that **many older drivers take longer to perform motor activities.** Weaker muscles, reduced flexibility and range of motion and conditions such as arthritis can make it more difficult to:

- turn our heads
- grip and turn the steering wheel
- press the accelerator or brake
- reach the controls or open windows and doors

Reduce your risk

As drivers age they must adapt their habits to accommodate physical and mental changes so they can continue to drive safely. You can take steps to change your driving habits and reduce your risk.

- Know the facts.
- Review your driving and learn how you can reduce your risk.
- Know your vehicle's safety features.
- Brush up on your driving knowledge to make sure you are up-to-date.
- Make a plan of action to help you continue to drive safely for as long as possible.

For more information

- Attend a *Living Well, Driving Well* workshop for mature drivers. Find out when there will be a workshop in your community. Call toll-free **1-877-297-2254** or e-mail **MDrivers@bcaa.com**
- Visit our website at **MatureDrivers.ca**
- Visit your local BCAA office for a copy of the *Mature Driver's Handbook*.



MatureDrivers.ca

