

Where do you stand?

The following safe driving tips are based on the [Think About Your Driving Review](#). It only looks at a few important areas; it is not an assessment of your driving skills or abilities. A complete evaluation of your driving ability would require medical, vision, physical and on-road assessments.

You probably already know what your problem areas are. Learn some important safe driving tips. If you are required to take a retest, or you simply want a second opinion as to where your on-road driving skills stand, go to our [Safe Driving Checklist](#).

1

Turning left

I get anxious when I make left turns.

“Rarely” is the best response to this statement. If you often experience difficulty making left turns, it may be a **warning sign** indicating that it is time to retire from driving.

Left turns at intersections can be difficult and dangerous, particularly when traffic is heavy. And, intersections are the most common location for collisions involving older drivers. There are often many traffic signs and signals at intersections. Also, you must interact with other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists whose movements and decisions are not always predictable. You may find driving through intersections stressful, they may cause a feeling of panic or you may be uncertain what to do.

Are other drivers impatient with you? Are you hesitant? Is there just too much information for you to handle all at once? Are you having difficulty reading the signs and signals? Have you had near misses? By asking yourself some questions like these, you might find a solution.

- Plan routes that do not require you to make a left turn at intersections. For example, you could make three right turns instead of a left turn.
- Plan your routes to avoid busy intersections or drive at times that are not as busy.
- Use intersections with left turn signals and/or left turn lanes.

2

Focus on your driving

Cyclists, pedestrians or other vehicles suddenly seem to appear out of nowhere.

“Rarely” is the best response to this statement. If you are failing to notice cyclists, pedestrians, or other vehicles, it may be a **warning sign** indicating that it is time to retire from driving.

Being startled by others who suddenly seem to appear out of nowhere can lead to dangerous situations requiring fast and safe reactions. But some older drivers may have difficulty integrating information from several sources at once and may

respond more slowly to dangerous situations. They only see the problem at the last minute and may have to brake suddenly to avoid a crash. Sudden stops can cause your car to skid out of control or into another vehicle.

It's important to be aware of what's in front, behind and beside your car at all times. Scanning ahead for situations that may arise is a key aspect of driving. To respond safely requires that you see the problem, think through complicated information quickly and then take the appropriate action.

- Give driving your full attention. Drivers have to make up to 15 major decisions every kilometre they drive.
- Remove or reduce any distractions so that you can focus on your driving (e.g., consider turning the radio off and keeping your participation in conversations to a minimum).
- Scan ahead and to the sides and check your mirrors frequently when you drive.
- Make sure you stay far enough behind the car in front. You need to stay at least two seconds behind when you are "city driving" in good conditions. Increase your following distance to three seconds on higher speed roads and to at least four seconds when conditions are poor.
- Try to avoid driving in fast-moving, busy traffic.
- Challenge yourself as you drive by asking yourself "What if?" to help you mentally prepare for any emergencies (e.g., "What if that little child in the playground ahead runs out into the street?").
- Take a refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the changes that occur as you age.

3

Driver stress

I find driving stressful.

"Rarely" is the best response to this statement.

If you answered "Always" or "Sometimes," perhaps you should try to discover why you get stressed when you drive. Ask yourself a few questions. Are you finding that there are too many cars on the road and they all seem to be going too fast? Are other drivers honking at you? Are you driving well below the speed limit? Is your knowledge of the traffic signs and rules of the road up-to-date?

It only takes a second of distraction caused by frustration, anger (or other strong emotions) to cause a crash.

- Do a pre-trip check each time before you drive. Ask yourself:
 - Are you alert and focused enough to take on the task of driving?
 - Are you prepared for the road conditions you will encounter?
 - Is your vehicle prepared for conditions and well-maintained?
- Try to avoid the kind of traffic situations and routes that make you stressed (e.g., avoid left turns).
- Take a few deep breaths if you are driving and find that traffic situations are making you frustrated.

- Make sure you leave enough time to get where you are going without feeling rushed.
- Consider taking a refresher course if you think that fear of traffic or responses from other drivers may be underlying causes for your stress, or if you find you are driving considerably more slowly than the surrounding traffic.
- Make sure you are up-to-date with the rules of the road and the traffic signs and signals.
- Adjust your speed to weather and road conditions.

4

Driving help from passengers

I need the help of a passenger to make sure I'm aware of traffic signs, signals and others on the road.

"Rarely" is the best response to this statement. If you do need the help of a passenger, it may be a **warning sign** that it is time to retire from driving.

Driving is a complicated task, and driving safely requires that drivers are able to scan ahead for traffic signs, signals, others on the road and changing road conditions. It requires the ability to take in all of that information, make many decisions and then take the appropriate and safest action many times for each kilometre driven. Safe drivers are able to handle the task of driving without relying on the help of a passenger.

- Give driving your full attention. Drivers have to make up to 15 major decisions every kilometre they drive.
- Remove or reduce any distractions so that you can focus on your driving (e.g., consider turning the radio off and keeping your participation in conversations to a minimum).
- Talk to your doctor if you are finding that you need to rely on a passenger for help. You may need a medical check-up to determine why you are having difficulty.

5

Concerned family and friends

My children, other family members or friends say they are concerned about my driving.

"Rarely" is the best response to this statement. If family or friends are expressing concerns, it may be a **warning sign** that it is time to retire from driving.

It's hard to hear things you may consider as criticism – particularly from your children, spouse or other family members. Older drivers often underestimate how much their own actions or problems can contribute to the risk of a crash. As hard as it is, it's important to listen to others' concerns so that you can try to improve your driving, avoid crashes and drive safely. If you start having collisions, though, it may be time to retire from driving.

- Listen to their concerns. Most likely, their comments come from a genuine concern for your safety, your passenger's safety and the safety of others on the road. Make sure you don't just dismiss their concerns.

- Look at your responses to other statements in this review. They might show you whether there are some steps you can and should take to improve your driving habits and abilities.
- Look for clues as to how you can address the concerns. Perhaps a refresher driving course, a medical check up, or an eye exam is in order.
- Begin to plan now for a day when driving may no longer be possible for you even if you think you still have more years of driving ahead of you. Planning now will help to ensure that you can still remain mobile even after you retire from driving.

6

Glare at night

At night, it's difficult for my eyes to recover from glare so I am able to see properly again.

"Rarely" is the best response to this statement.

It only takes a split second for a dangerous situation to occur. As we age, 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. While you can't control the effects of glare on your eyes, you can decide to drive at times when glare is not as likely to be a problem. It will help ensure your safety and the safety of other road users on your route.

Good vision is essential to safe driving. Sensitivity to glare is not the only problem older drivers can face:

- The retina becomes less sensitive to light.
- Our ability to change our focus starts to slow down around age 40.
- Peripheral vision narrows and depth perception declines as we age.
- Colours become more difficult to see.

For more information, go to [Effects of Aging on Drivers](#).

- Choose to drive at times when glare is not as likely to be a problem and when light and driving conditions are favourable. That means avoiding driving at night, at twilight and when it's raining.
- Ensure that you have regular examinations by an eye doctor. Tell your doctor that you want to ensure that you remain a safe driver.
- Make sure your wipers clean the windshield effectively and that you have plenty of windshield washer fluid.
- Make sure your windshield is clean and that there are no chips, cracks or scratches that reduce your visibility.

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Vision and driving

I get my eyes checked and buy new glasses (or lenses) when they are prescribed by the eye doctor.

"Always" is the best response to this statement.

Over 85% of the information we need to make safe driving decisions comes from our ability to see. We also use our hearing when we drive. For more information, go to [Seeing and Hearing](#).

- Ensure that you have regular examinations by an eye doctor. Ask your doctor if you have any medical conditions that might affect your vision and your ability to drive safely.
- Make sure you follow your eye doctor's advice. Change your eye glass prescription when advised and use your glasses when necessary.
- Accept that your ability to see is not what it once was. Limit your driving at night, twilight and during poor weather and other low-light conditions.
- Avoid tinted windshields and keep your windows clean both inside and out.
- Get your hearing checked and follow your doctor's advice.

8

Operating the gas and brake

I can quickly and easily move my foot from the gas to the brake and easily press the pedals.

"Always" is the best response to this statement.

You are a potential hazard on the road if you have trouble moving your foot from the gas to the brake, or find it difficult to properly press the pedals, maintain consistent speed or brake smoothly. Fitness is an important part of your ability to drive safely and respond quickly to emergency situations. Weaker muscles, reduced flexibility and range of motion and conditions such as arthritis more often occur in older drivers making it more difficult to press the accelerator or brake, grip and turn the steering wheel, etc. Being fit can help you feel more in control of your future as a driver.

- Talk to your health care providers to see if you are a candidate for a fitness program. He or she may also recommend physiotherapy, medications to reduce stiffness or other medical interventions.

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Operating the driving controls

I can easily operate all of the driving controls in my car.

"Always" is the best response to this statement.

If you are having trouble reaching or operating the controls on the dash or steering column that are essential for driving, it may be a sign that your fitness level has declined. Fitness is an important part of your ability to drive safely and respond quickly to emergency situations on the road. Weaker muscles, reduced flexibility and range of motion and conditions such as arthritis more often occur in older drivers making it more difficult to do things such as reach or operate the controls. Being fit can help you feel more in control of your future as a driver.

- Talk to your health care providers to see if you are a candidate for a fitness program. He or she may also recommend physiotherapy, medications to reduce stiffness or other medical interventions.

10

Signalling

I signal AND look over my shoulder to the rear when I change lanes.

“Always” is the best response to this statement.

This is the best way to avoid hitting another vehicle when you change lanes: use the three-step process of checking your mirrors, looking over your shoulder to check the blind spots and signalling well before you change lanes. Perhaps you simply forget or your habits have become a bit sloppy with time. Or perhaps you’ve lost some flexibility in your neck.

- Be aware of your driving habits and always remember to check your mirrors, check over your shoulder and signal before you begin to change lanes.
- Make sure all your signal and brake lights work.
- Ask your health care providers about exercises or medications to improve your flexibility.
- Take a refresher course to help you adjust to some of the physical changes that occur as you age.

11

Using your driving skills

I get opportunities to drive.

“Always” is the best response to this statement.

Driving is like golfing, playing bridge or knitting – the more you do it, the less likely your skills and abilities will decline. We’ve all heard the phrase “If you don’t use it, you’ll lose it.” If you want to maintain your driving confidence and reduce your risk, it is important that you continue to drive.

- Take turns driving if you are married or have a partner and if both of you still wish to drive and feel confident in your skills and abilities. It’s important that both of you have an opportunity to maintain your skills.
- Invite feedback so you can improve your skills and abilities. Go to [Put Your Driving to the Test](#) and use the [Safe Driving Checklist](#).

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Medications and driving

I check with my doctor or pharmacist about the effects of my medication(s) on my driving ability (includes prescription, non-prescription and herbal medications).

“Always” is the best response to this statement.

Even over-the-counter medications and herbal remedies can have a negative impact on your ability to drive safely. Combinations of medications can also cause problems with unexpected side effects and bad reactions. Some medications cause drowsiness or disorientation or can slow reaction times, greatly increasing the risk of a crash.

Alcohol also has a negative impact on your ability to drive safely and, taken with other medications, it can significantly impair your ability to drive. It’s against the law to drive while you are impaired by drugs (even those prescribed by your doctor) and/or alcohol. This is an area where you have a great deal of control in ensuring your own safety on the road.

- Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist about any effects your prescribed, over-the-counter or herbal medications can have on your driving. If you are seeing a number of different health care providers, take all of your medications with you when you have an appointment.
- Read all of the labels and information sheets that come with your medications. Combinations of medications can magnify their effects well beyond the individual warnings for each medication.
- Avoid alcohol completely if you plan to drive and refuse to drive with anyone who has been drinking.

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Medical conditions and driving

I ask my doctor if any medical condition I have could affect my ability to drive.

“Always” is the best response to this statement.

Many medical conditions, illnesses and physical injuries can affect your ability to drive safely. Ask your doctor if you can drive safely while you are dealing with an injury, illness, or any other medical condition. Let him or her know if a medical condition you have is changing.

- Respect your doctor’s advice if he or she suggests you change your driving habits or stop driving – even if it’s only for a short time.
- If you have a new injury, medical condition or illness, driving may be risky. Talk to your family and friends. Chances are, they can help you get to appointments and other places until you’re back on your feet again.
- Make sure you read the labels of any new medications. Talk to your pharmacist. Some medications (prescribed, over-the-counter medications and herbal remedies) can have an impact on your ability to drive safely, especially when taken in combination.

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Traffic tickets

How many traffic tickets, warnings or discussions with police officers (about your driving) have you had in the past two years?

“None” is the best response to this question.

Even one ticket indicates that there are areas where you can improve your skills or make adjustments to your driving habits. “Three or more” means that you really need to take a look at how you are driving. If you have been stopped that many times, it means that you are driving in an unsafe manner most of the time. It may be time to look at other ways of getting around. Just because you have not received any tickets doesn’t mean you are a safe driver.

- Use the ticket(s) as a warning. You need to act quickly to improve your driving. Start by reading through all of these **Safe Driving Tips**.
- Enrol in a refresher course for older drivers so that you can brush up on your skills and learn new ways of handling the challenges faced by older drivers.

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Traffic crashes

How many crashes have you had during the past two years? (Don't forget to include "fender-benders" and small scrapes.)

"None" is the best response to this question. Any crash, even a small scrape or dent, must not be ignored. If you notice scrapes or dents on your car, garage or mailbox, or if you start having "near misses," these are important **warning signs** that it is time to retire from driving.

If you answered "Three or more," you really need to consider your future as a driver. A collision is often the best predictor of another collision (and that includes fender-benders and small scrapes). The next collision could be serious. Denial of diminishing skills is the older driver's worst enemy. It leads to continued dangerous driving habits and keeps you from learning safer ways to drive – and that can lead to tragedy. Once you start having collisions, the authorities can take your licence away.

- Take a refresher course. Even if the collision was not your fault, such a course will help you learn to anticipate trouble before it can cause any damage.
- Avoid driving at night, in bad weather or in heavy traffic if your collisions occurred at these times.
- Look ahead and start planning realistically for the day when you retire from driving. For some ideas, go to [Plan Ahead](#) and use the **Planning Ahead Worksheet**.

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