



SUPPORTING SENIOR DRIVERS

How friends and family can help



NZ Transport Agency

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This publication is also available on NZ Transport Agency's website at www.nzta.govt.nz



Many older people rely on their car to get around. Having a car makes it easy to go shopping, get to appointments and catch up with friends – without having to ask anyone else for help.

Some people will be able to keep driving well into their 80s and 90s. Others may have to stop driving because they can't renew their driver licence after they turn 75.

If you have an older friend or relative who is still driving, you can help them:

- **keep a check on whether they're still able to drive safely**
- **plan ahead so they can get around safely and easily if they have to stop driving for any reason.**

This booklet suggests ways you can help them stay mobile for as long as possible – with or without a car.

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How safe are older drivers?

Most older drivers are very safe and responsible. They've been driving for many years without any problems, and they don't usually take risks on the road. They drive fewer kilometres per year than other drivers, and they have fewer crashes.

As people get older, however, there may be changes in their health that affect their ability to drive safely. Also, if older drivers are involved in a crash, they and their older passengers are more likely to be seriously hurt or killed because their bodies are more easily injured.

From the late 2030s, New Zealanders over the age of 65 will make up about 25 percent of the population. This means there'll be more older drivers on our roads than ever before.



Why should I get involved?

Driving is a complicated task. To be a good driver, you need to be in good health and able to concentrate for long periods of time.

As people get older, their driving ability can be affected by changes in:

- their eyesight
- their memory
- their ability to make decisions quickly
- their ability to react quickly when driving.

Because these changes often happen gradually, drivers themselves may not be aware of any problems. If you're regularly in a car with an older driver, you may be the first to notice any problems.

You may be able to offer practical help if an older friend or relative is having difficulties with driving. If they have to give up driving for any reason, you could help them think about other options for getting around safely and easily.

What should I look for?

If you observe an older person's driving over a period of time, you may notice changes in their driving skills. The list on page 6 includes some things you could look out for, starting with fairly minor problems and ending with more serious concerns. These are only examples – you might also notice other things that worry you.

If these things only happen once, there may not be a serious problem. But if any of them happen often, it's likely that your friend or relative is having trouble with driving.

If minor problems happen, it may not mean your friend or relative has to give up driving altogether. For example, they could only drive:

- in the daytime or in good weather
- on routes that they know well
- for short distances.

However, more serious problems need to be dealt with urgently to prevent the driver harming themselves or others.



- **The driver says they're not feeling as confident about driving as they used to.**
- **They find it hard to turn around to see when they're reversing.**
- **They're easily distracted.**
- **Other drivers 'honk' at them.**
- **You notice scratches or dents on the driver's car, letter box or garage. If they don't know how these happened, it could be a sign that they're not able to pay full attention when driving.**
- **You can see they get irritated or upset when driving.**
- **They drive too fast or too slow for the conditions.**
- **They fail to spot hazards (such as a pedestrian running out onto the road).**
- **They rely on a passenger to give them instructions when they're driving.**
- **They have a 'near miss'.**
- **They don't keep within their lane.**
- **They get a traffic ticket.**
- **They sometimes get lost in places they know well (for example, after taking the wrong exit at a roundabout by mistake).**
- **They're involved in a crash which is at least partly their fault.**
- **They fail to stop at a stop sign or red light.**
- **They mix up the brake and accelerator pedals.**
- **They stop in traffic for no apparent reason.**

The booklet *The road ahead: transport options for seniors* has information about renewing a driver licence after turning 75.

It also has suggestions on how seniors can get around safely if they have to give up driving.

To get a copy, you can:

- visit www.nzta.govt.nz/resources
- call the Transport Agency contact centre on 0800 822 422.



Talking it over

If you're worried about a friend or relative's driving, it can be tricky to raise the subject with them. Here are some suggestions.

- Stay calm and respectful. Focus on the things that are worrying you - not on their driving in general.
- Encourage them to talk about their health. Are they having any problems that might affect their driving? Could their medication be causing problems? You could suggest they visit their doctor for a check-up. Offer to go with them, if that would help.
- Encourage them to stay fit and healthy. If they keep their mind and body active with exercise and other interests, this may also help them to drive safely.
- Take the time to find out what they want or need. Help them plan ahead and get them to think about how they could get around safely without a car.
- Suggest they fill in the online self-assessment form at www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/senior-road-users/driving/form.html
- This will give them an idea of how safe they are on the road. It also has tips on how they could improve their driving.
- Encourage your friend or relative to attend a driver training course, such as a Staying Safe workshop for seniors. See page 14 for more information about suitable training and assessment courses.



What if they won't listen?

If your friend or relative insists their driving is fine, but you want to raise serious concerns, you may need to change the way you go about it.

- Are you the best person to talk about the issue with them? You could talk to other family members or friends, and agree on the person (or people) they're most likely to listen to.
- It may take several conversations before your friend or relative is willing to take any action on their driving.
- Remember that they may be more willing to listen to your concerns if you can also offer some practical help or solutions.
- If you think there's an urgent safety issue (for example, they've had recent 'near misses' or crashes), contact their doctor directly to discuss your concerns.
- If the doctor thinks it's appropriate, they may contact the Transport Agency.
- Your friend or relative will then have to book an appointment with the doctor for a new Medical certificate for driver licence.
- If the doctor isn't sure that your friend or relative is safe to drive, they might have to sit an on-road safety test.
- They may also need to see a specialist, such as an occupational therapist, to check whether any health issues are affecting their driving.
- Occupational therapists can suggest ways to stay safe while driving. They can also give advice on how safety can be improved with suitable vehicles and equipment. For more information about occupational therapists, see page 16.



Practical help

Sharing the load

- Offer your friend or relative a lift when they don't feel confident driving (for example, if they need to drive out of their local area, or after dark).
- If they find supermarket car parks a challenge, you could do your shopping together. This way, you're providing both transport and company.

You could also do some research to find out which local shops will do home delivery. You could help your friend or relative with online shopping too – perhaps even offer them a spare computer if they don't already have one.

Choosing a car

Some driving problems may be helped by car safety features. If your friend or relative is looking for a new car, you could offer to go with them. Safety features could include:

- automatic transmission
- power steering
- an antilock braking system (ABS)
- large mirrors to cover blind spots.

See page 16 for information about CarFit, a free service that helps seniors make the most of their car's safety features.

Moving house

If your friend or relative is planning to move house, you could offer to help with the search. Discuss what they need to look for. For example:

- Can they walk or take the bus to shops, library, doctor's rooms, church or other community facilities?
- Are there good footpaths, street lighting and pedestrian crossings?
- Do friends and family live nearby?
- Is it close to the shops?



Driver training and assessment

You could suggest that your friend or relative enrol in a training course. The courses below are designed to upgrade seniors' skills and knowledge to keep them driving safely.

Staying Safe workshops

Staying Safe workshops are for older people who want to keep driving as long as possible. They give seniors a chance to keep up to date with the road code and to catch up with any changes to the road rules.

The workshops also provide information on other safe transport options for older people who have to give up driving.

To find about Staying Safe workshops in your area, you can:

- check www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/driving-safely/senior-drivers
 - call 0800 822 422.
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Private courses

- The New Zealand Automobile Association runs driving check-ups with fully qualified driving instructors. These are a good way for seniors to improve their driving. It may be a long time since they passed their driving test and the check-up is a chance to update their knowledge of road rules.
- Many driving schools also run assessment and training courses that are suitable for seniors. Check with your local driving school.



CarFit

CarFit is a free programme run by volunteers. It helps senior drivers make sure their car is as safe and comfortable as possible. It can help with things such as:

- moving car seats to the safest and most comfortable position
- making sure the driver can see their car's mirrors clearly
- adjusting the steering wheel and safety belts so they're comfortable and safe
- giving advice about safety features, such as special mirrors that reduce blind spots.

To find out more about the CarFit programme, visit www.aa.co.nz/carfit

Occupational therapist check-ups

Your friend or relative's doctor might refer them to an occupational therapist to check whether or not they're able to drive safely. The check-up could include the effects of any health problems or disabilities.

The therapist can also give advice on suitable vehicles or equipment that can improve the driver's safety.

For more information, see Factsheet 51: *OT assessments: occupational therapists and driver licensing*. To get a copy, you can:

- visit www.nzta.govt.nz/factsheets/51
- call the Transport Agency on 0800 822 422.



Coping without a car

If your friend or relative does have to give up driving, encourage them to see this as a change, not an end. Help them to think about other options for getting around safely.

Public transport

- You could help your friend or relative to pick up the latest timetables for their local bus or train services. You can get these from the local library, council, Citizens' Advice Bureau or transport companies.
- Check if public transport is regular and reliable in their area. How easy is it for them to get on or off the bus or train?
- Check whether their Supergold card entitles them to free or discounted travel in their area. To find out more about this:
 - › visit www.supergold.govt.nz
 - › call 0800 254 565
 - › contact your local council.

Mobility scooters

If your friend or relative is unable to drive safely because of health problems, an electric-powered mobility scooter could help. Note that if they've lost their driver licence because of hearing or vision problems, they may not be able to drive a scooter safely.

The booklet *Ready to ride: keeping safe on your mobility scooter* has information about how to use a scooter safely. To get a copy, you can:

- visit www.nzta.govt.nz/resources
- call the Transport Agency contact centre on 0800 822 422.

Community transport services

In some areas, volunteers provide transport for seniors who can no longer drive. You could find out more about these from the local:

- library or council office
- branch of Age Concern
- doctor's rooms.



Taxis

- Check that there's a reliable taxi service where your friend or relative lives.
- Many people think taxis are too expensive to use regularly. But it can cost up to \$2500 a year to run a small car. That's a lot of taxi fares! You could help your friend or relative to work out the cost of owning a car by visiting www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/Safety/docs/Cost-of-running-a-vehicle.docx.
- If they have a disability, such as Parkinson's, diabetes, arthritis or problems with their eyesight, they may be able to get discounts on taxi fares through the Total Mobility Scheme. You can find out more about the scheme from the Transport Agency brochure *Total mobility around New Zealand*. To get a copy:
 - › email info@nzta.govt.nz
 - › visit www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/total-mobility-scheme/docs/total-mobility-around-new-zealand.pdf
 - › call the NZ Transport Agency on 0800 822 422.

Transport in rural areas

- Public transport may be less frequent in rural areas than in the city. Check with the local council, library or Citizens' Advice Bureau to see what is available.
- In some rural areas, there's a network of community transport services. Sometimes these are run by volunteers. You could find out more about these from the local:
 - › library or council office
 - › branch of Age Concern
 - › doctor's rooms.

Find out more

The following Transport Agency publications have information that will help you support an older driver.

- *The road ahead: transport options for seniors*
- *Guide to the on-road safety test*
- *Ready to ride: keeping safe on your mobility scooter*
- *Factsheet 16: Diabetes and driving*
- *Factsheet 17: Epilepsy/seizures and driving*
- *Factsheet 23: Dementia and driving*
- *Factsheet 24: Fatigue: staying alert while you're driving*
- *Factsheet 25: Vision and driving*
- *Factsheet 31: Disabilities and driving*
- *Factsheet 36: Head injuries and driving*
- *Factsheet 51: OT assessments: occupational therapists and driver licensing*
- *Factsheet 57: Older drivers: driver licence renewal*

To get a copy of any of these publications:

- visit www.nzta.govt.nz/resources
- call the NZ Transport Agency contact centre on 0800 822 422.



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