



# Keeping Seniors Safe on the Road

How comfort can affect safety behind the wheel

# A Growing Population

## We're all getting older

The population 65+ is continues to grow and stay behind the wheel longer.

By 2030, more than 70 million people in the U.S. will be over the age of 65, with about 85 – 90% of them licensed to drive.

# Senior Drivers

Senior drivers are typically safe drivers because they:

- Wear their seat belts
- Observe the speed limit
- Don't drink and drive
- Limit driving to times when they feel comfortable on the road



# Senior Drivers

And they recognize and try to avoid situations where limitations can put them at risk:

- Driving after dark
- Driving during rush hour
- Driving in bad weather
- Driving on difficult or unfamiliar roadways like highways and difficult intersections





# However...

Senior drivers are more likely to be seriously injured or killed in traffic crashes due to age-related fragility.

Certain medical conditions can also make it more difficult for them to recover from serious injuries.





What's more... driving can become more difficult or uncomfortable as we age due to natural changes that happen to our bodies, including:

- **VISION**
- **COGNITION**
- **FLEXIBILITY**

Consider the following...

# How the Body Changes as We Age

## By Age 40

- Mental sharpness begins to diminish
- Thought processing slows
- Multi-tasking becomes more challenging
- Night vision worsens and recovery from glare becomes difficult.

## By Age 50

- 9 in 10 people will require bifocals
- Reaction time slows

## Between Age 30-60

- Muscle strength and range of motion can decrease by up to 40 percent

## By Age 70

- Arthritic joints may make movement painful and restrict mobility
- Conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, hypertension and diabetes may affect how we interpret and react to the driving environment.

# VISION



As we age, our eye's lenses lose the ability to change focus quickly, peripheral vision narrows, and the retina becomes more sensitive to light.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The average 75-year-old needs 3x more light than a 25-year-old to see the same thing.



# How to Enhance VISION

- Scan the road ahead to spot trouble before reaching it
- When driving at night, adjust speed to the range of the headlights
- Limit nighttime driving if there are issues with seeing clearly at night
- Add a larger rear-view mirror to increase range of vision
- Get regular eye exams
- Turn head frequently
- Keep auto glass clean



# COGNITION



Older minds are just as sharp as younger minds – no question. But age lengthens the time it takes the brain to process information and makes it harder to ignore distractions.

Reacting to a situation involves four steps – **IPDE** – **identify**, **predict**, **decide** and **execute**.

As we get older, each step takes longer and could be dangerous.

# How to Enhance COGNITION

- Plan route ahead of time
- Eliminate distractions
- Increase following distance
- Use side roads
- Keep the mind sharp when not driving





# FLEXIBILITY

Driving is a physical activity, and not everyone has the strength, flexibility or coordination to drive safely.

## **As we age, we might notice:**

- It takes longer to enter/exit the vehicle
- Difficulty reaching for the seat belt or turning to check blind spots.

**These are all COMMON!**



# How to Enhance FLEXIBILITY

- Exercise (walk, yoga, bike, etc.) for at least 20 minutes a day, five days a week
- Gardening
- Playing sports like golf/tennis
- Be active! Track progress using a smart watch.







# Extending safe driving years

**Through a program called CARFIT, senior drivers can get a comprehensive check of how well they “fit” their vehicles.**

Developed by the American Society on Aging, in partnership with AAA, AARP and the American Occupational Therapy Association, CarFit is a 15 - 20 minute personal assessment of a senior’s “fit” in their vehicle to ensure the two work well together.

**During a CarFit assessment, certified technicians will ensure that a senior driver:**

- Is properly positioned in the vehicle
- Can easily access vehicle components
- Is seated a safe distance away from the steering wheel
- Is comfortable adjusting their seating position, reaching for the seat belt and checking for blind spots
- Has an appropriate line of sight above the steering wheel
- Understands how ADAS technologies work and the limitations

**They'll also offer helpful suggestions for minimizing blind spots, give information on tire safety and provide resources for adaptive devices.**



## What CarFit IS...

- 100% voluntary
- An assessment to see how well a senior driver “fits” their vehicle, and where modifications are can be made to make them more comfortable and most important, safer.

Recommendations are made by technicians, but the driver always retains the right to not change something if it makes them uncomfortable.

## What CarFit IS NOT...

- A test that can be passed or failed
- An opportunity to take a senior driver’s license away.

# Driving Cessation



**“At what age does someone need to stop driving?”**

A driver's chronological age is not a good predictor of driving ability, so it's impossible to define an age when people should stop driving. What counts is their performance on the road.

When driving is no longer safe, that is when it's time to give up the keys. Some warning signs...



## **Warning signs that it might be time to start thinking about retiring the keys:**

- Having a series of minor crashes or near misses
- Having wandering thoughts or not being able to concentrate
- Being unable to read ordinary road signs
- Getting lost on familiar roads
- Having other drivers honk frequently
- Feeling nervous or exhausted after driving
- Being spoken to about driving by police, family or friends

## **How to plan for “driving retirement”:**

- Seniors are healthier and living longer than ever
- Seniors are outliving their ability to drive safely by 7 – 10 years
- Planning NOW for a time when driving is no longer an option is critical to maintaining independence.

## **Encourage seniors to think about things like:**

- Where they will want to live
- How they will want to remain active/independent
- How they will get around

# One Last Thing...



**Not familiar with ride-sharing apps or confused about how to use them?**

AAA offers a separate program called **It's Uber Easy to Get a Lyft**, which helps older drivers learn to use and feel comfortable with apps like Uber and Lyft.

During the interactive presentation, we will demonstrate how to download the apps, how to create a count and how to request a ride.



# THANK YOU!

Shani Jarvis  
Outreach Manager  
AAA Northeast  
973-886-8772  
[sjarvis@aaanortheast.com](mailto:sjarvis@aaanortheast.com)