

Simple steps insure safe driving skills for seniors

It doesn't take much time on the road to find a bad driver. Every age group has bad drivers, and they put everyone at risk of an accident. The Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles reports that 70 percent of accidents are the result of human error caused from driver inattention and failure to observe the rules of the road.

Without a doubt, the highest risk group is teenagers. Accidents involving teens are attributed to a lack of structured driver training, poor decision-making, risk-taking behavior and driver immaturity.

However, physical and medical conditions are the primary factors attributed to the second highest risk group – drivers over age 75. As part of the aging process, drivers experience certain limitations that affect their reaction and judgement. These factors include:

- poor eyesight
- muscular or skeletal problems
- declining perception or awareness
- side effects of prescription medications including over-the-counter cold remedies, sleeping pills, etc.
- In addition, persons with symptoms of depression, problems with memory recall, or a history of back pain pose a high risk of being involved in an auto accident.

The American Geriatrics Society lists warning signs that indicate if your driving skills are declining. They include:

- Running stop signs or red lights without realizing it
- Stopping for green lights
- Experiencing near misses with vehicles, pedestrians or objects without realizing it
- Merging into another lane without looking
- Going the wrong way against traffic
- Getting lost in familiar areas
- Stopping in the middle of intersections
- Confusing the gas and the brake pedal



The Indiana State Medical Association recommends talking to your physician if you suspect a decline in your driving skills. Your doctor can review your health history and medications as well as test your vision and memory. Other ways to improve driving skills include:

- Having proper glasses. (Do not wear sunglasses or darkly tinted lenses at night)
- Driving on well-lighted roads and streets
- Avoiding night driving
- Keeping headlights and windshields clean
- Being aware of any changes in your peripheral vision
- Avoiding heavy traffic and unfamiliar roads

Indiana no longer requires an age-based driving skills test. Instead, screening is based on driver performance records. Tests are administered to anyone who exceeds 14 points on their driver's license or has three traffic convictions within a 12-month period.

Changes in health or age do not always mean giving up driving or other activities. Regular eye examinations and medical check-ups will help you keep abreast of changes that can affect your driving safety.



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