

Understanding Mind & Body Changes in Senior Drivers

Dealing with the mental and physical changes in the body as you age can be tough. But, to stay safe, it's important to recognize these challenges in order to decide **if and when to surrender your license**.

Below are several of the common physical and mental changes that can affect your abilities as a senior driver.

Physical Changes

Physical changes can make it more difficult to **maintain control of the vehicle**. Some of the changes commonly experienced by senior drivers include:

- **Vision impairments**
 - Even if you don't wear glasses and you pass the eye exam required for your driver's license, vision changes can still create problems.
 - As a senior driver, you may experience difficulty:
 - When **daylight is limited**.
 - **Recognizing other vehicles or obstacles** up the road.
 - With **glare** from approaching headlights.
 - Locating **objects** in your **peripheral** vision.
 - Judging **distance**.
- **Hearing loss**
 - If you have problems hearing while driving, it may make it difficult to:
 - Recognize **sirens** or other **emergency vehicle**

warnings.

- Pick up sounds in heavy traffic areas, such as **car horns** or **approaching traffic**.
- **Hear sounds from your own vehicle**, such as **warning notifications** or an existing problem with your car's functionality.
- **Joint pain**
 - Pain in the knees, legs, or ankles can cause problems when **moving your foot from the accelerator to the brake** and vice versa.
 - Swelling and stiffness in the joints will also affect your mobility.
- **Inflexibility**
 - The range of motion in your joints will decrease with time.
 - **Looking over your shoulder** to check for blind spots will be more of a challenge if you have any flexibility issues moving the neck or shoulders.
- **Decrease in strength**
 - A decrease in muscular strength can make **steering the vehicle harder** to manage.
 - It may also affect your ability to **move from the accelerator to brake** quickly.

Mental Changes

Like physical changes, mental changes associated with age can present new challenges for senior drivers.

Mental changes commonly seen in senior drivers that may affect your ability to operate a vehicle safely include a decline in your:

- **Reaction time**
 - When driving, you receive lots of information at once.

As you age, **the brain will need additional time to process** the information it's receiving.

- If you're unable to process all of this information and decipher what requires your attention most, it will affect **how quickly you react in dangerous situations.**
- **Attention span**
 - Becoming distracted easily from outside stimuli as you age can **cause you to lose your focus** of the road. •

Concentration

- The older you get, the harder it is to **maintain concentration for extended periods of time.**
- **Cognition**
 - A loss in cognitive abilities will affect your ability to remember:
 - Your **destination.**
 - The **meanings of traffic signs.**
 - **Pavement markings.**

Medical Conditions

Several medical conditions can severely impair your ability to operate a vehicle. Because of this, you should speak with your doctor to determine whether you should surrender your license if you have any of the following diagnoses:

- **Dementia**
 - This brain disorder may slow your **reaction time and decision making.**
 - Speak with your doctor if you've recently had problems:
 - **Remembering** familiar locations.
 - With **road rage.**
 - Becoming **confused for no reason.**
 - **Confusing the locations** of the **gas and brake**

pedals.

- **Collisions with objects** such as curbs or other stationary objects.

- **Diabetes**

- Spikes and severe dips in your blood sugar may result in a **loss of consciousness** or a **seizure**.

- **Macular degeneration**

- This condition can make **objects in the distance seem out of focus**.
- This will make it more **difficult to clearly see**:
 - Road signs.
 - Traffic.
 - Pedestrians.

- **Arthritis**

- **Swollen and stiff joints** are common ailments among individuals with arthritis.
- Controlling the vehicle may become more difficult due to limited movement in the:
 - Shoulders.
 - Hands.
 - Neck.

- **Alzheimer's disease**

- **Loss of memory and cognitive abilities** are warning signs of this disease.
- Even in the early stages, you may:
 - Become **lost** easily.
 - Not be able **recognize familiar places**.
 - Suddenly become **confused** for no reason.
 - Have difficulty following **directions**.

- **Stroke**

- If you've had a stroke, these symptoms may make it

impossible to operate a vehicle safely:

- **Weakness on one side of the body.**
 - The inability to control certain body parts.
- **Difficulty thinking clearly.**
- **Parkinson's disease**
 - **Balance and movement** will be affected by this disease.
 - Holding the steering wheel and operating the accelerator and brake pedals will be harder due to **shaking in the:**
 - **Hands.**
 - **Legs.**
 - **Arms.**

In addition to these diseases, certain **medications** may also cause changes that make operating a vehicle more dangerous. It's important to **read all of the labels on your prescriptions** and ask your doctor if any of your current medications may **affect your ability to drive.**