

Knowing When to Help

*When is the right time to hire home care? To think about a nursing home?
For them to stop driving?*

When Is the Right Time to Intervene?

Questions of timing are some of the most difficult when it comes to caring for the elderly. As a caregiver, it is very likely you will constantly be second-guessing yourself and your aging relative, trying to determine what needs to be done, how and when.

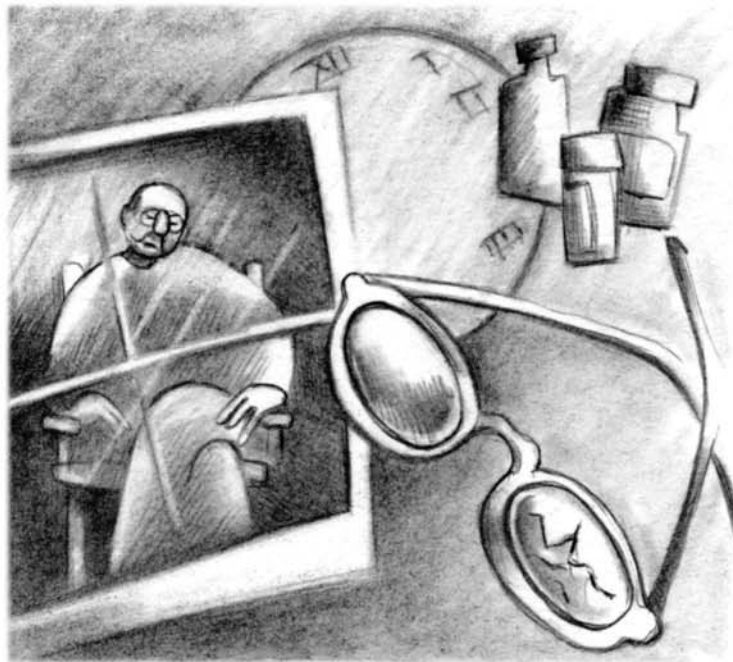
Changes take place from middle age to the mid-60s. For some, frailty may not set in until the mid-80s.

Start by observing. Are things not getting done? Are doctor's appointments or medications missed? Offer to do various favors around the house or run errands. Make notes about doctor's appointments and use those as opportunities to talk to the doctor about mental and physical signs to look for.

When Is It No Longer Safe to Drive?

Eventually, most elderly people must stop driving. Because of failing eyesight, hearing, dementia or other health problems, older people may become a danger to themselves or to others on the road. But how do you know when someone should stop driving?

Most people are resistant to having their driver's license taken away; the ability to drive gives people a sense of freedom and independence. They might even view their driver's license as their last grasp on a "normal" life.



There are some warning signs to watch for:

- More than one at-fault accident in a year
- Getting lost frequently
- Unexplained scratches or dents in the car
- Change in lens prescription, eye exam

Often, the elderly driver will not admit to a problem; it will be up to

those who care for them to suggest, gently, that they might want to think about taking a driver's exam. Or, you may simply offer to drive them to the store, to the doctor, wherever necessary. Explain that you care about their safety, and that you only want what is best for them.

How Do You Know When Caregiving Is Harming the Healthier Spouse?

Caregiving is a stressful activity, and over a long period of time it can begin to wear on the healthier spouse.

How do you know if this is happening?

There are some warning signs to watch for in the caregiving spouse:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Complaining
- Lapses in care
- Abusive behavior
- Drug or alcohol addiction

If you observe any of these symptoms in the healthier spouse who is caring for your aging relative, it might be time for some frank discussion about other options and choices. The spouse might need to take a vacation, for instance, or consider day care, home care, an assisted living facility or a nursing home.