



Typically, loss of driving comes in stages:

1. No night driving
2. No inclement weather driving
3. Driving only familiar routes

To Drive or Not to Drive

Being able to drive gives people a feeling of independence and freedom. It means being able to go wherever, whenever and with whomever we want. There are relatively few restrictions and no one controls our destiny.

Because of its links to independence, for seniors, having their driver's license taken away because of medical or physical problems can be distressing. There is a point, however, at which people can no longer safely drive—when getting behind the wheel puts both the driver and other people on the road in danger.

Warning Signs

When someone is becoming an unsafe driver, the warning signs often come gradually. At first, people may not notice warning signs or may attribute them to something else. Eventually, however, the signs become so pervasive that they are hard to ignore. Or, perhaps, there is a crisis—such as a serious accident—that forces everyone to take notice.

Here are some warning signs that you can watch for:

- More than one at-fault accident in a year
- Getting lost or easily confused
- Unexplained scratches or dents in the car
- Tickets for unsafe driving
- Inability to read road signs
- Inability to hear horns or other sounds
- Medical treatment for cataracts, glaucoma, ear problems, etc.

What to Do

Often, family members are put in the position of watching an elderly relative's driving ability decline, without knowing what to do. Mentioning it to the person might have just the opposite of the intended effect—making the senior defensive, angry or embarrassed, and insisting that they can drive just fine.

Some states have laws that require senior citizens to retake the driving test after a certain age to check for vision, reaction time and assessment abilities. Sometimes the best thing to do is ask a doctor, counselor or social worker to give a patient a "no more driving" prescription. Hearing the bad news from a professional, rather than a family member, can make the senior more amenable to taking the advice. Taking the driver to get a driver's test may also do the trick; the objective standards of the test are impossible to dispute. Though getting the person's license taken away seems drastic, sometimes it is the only way.

Alternatives

Seniors who can no longer drive do have other options, such as carpooling, bus or van services sponsored by senior centers or hospitals, public transportation, and family and friends. Help your elderly relative by researching the services available in your community. Learning about options can help ease the transition from being a driver to being a passenger.