

SAFE DRIVING: PART 2

This is the second of a two part series; the first appeared last month in The Golden Times.

Good driving depends on ability, not age. Some driving situations pose more difficulty – night, bad weather and highways – for people of all ages. Older drivers are more at risk while changing lanes, making left-hand turns, yielding and passing. If you experience difficulty with these driving conditions, you can try to avoid them – take alternate routes and drive only in daylight. It goes without saying that you must maintain your car. Keep the windshield, headlights, windows and mirrors clean. Check the windshield wipers often and maintain wiper fluid levels. It is also important to minimize distractions such as the radio or conversation – and definitely do not drive and talk on the phone.

Many seniors have slower reflexes so it's important to leave plenty of room between your car and the one ahead. It's also important to keep up with the flow of traffic to avoid someone tailgating you.

There are ways to improve your driving skills no matter what your age! AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) sponsors "55-Alive/Driver Safety Program" classes which teach people about defensive driving. Call 1-888-227-7669 or go to www.aarp.org/drive, to find out about courses in this area. AAA has a class called "Safe Driving for Mature Operators". Call 617-332-9900 or 1-800-222-8252 for more information. These 8-hour classroom courses inform seniors about the aging process and how to adjust your driving accordingly.

If you've made some changes in your driving habits, this may be the first sign that driving is becoming a problem. How do you know when it's time to give up driving? Has family or friends questioned your ability? Do people decline your offer to be the driver? Do other drivers honk at you? Have you had minor accidents ("fender-benders") or misjudged and hit the curb, lawn or sidewalk? Have you been "surprised" by a car or pedestrian who suddenly appeared?

If you have answered yes to one of these questions or if you have your own doubts about your abilities, there are driving evaluation programs which include two parts – clinical assessment and on-the-road evaluation – performed by driving rehabilitation specialists. Your physician must refer you for this evaluation. For more information about these programs, contact Kathy at the senior center.

Remember, if you have any doubt about your ability to safely drive, don't wait until it's too late. Have an open discussion with your doctor and family. Take a refresher course. Get regular medical check ups. Stay strong. And seek out alternative transportation and community services which can help you if you decide to stop driving.

For more information, call Kathy at (617) 796-1660.