



Is It Time to Stop Driving?

Are you wondering if your parent or spouse is still safe to drive? Have there been some incidents in the recent past that have given you cause for concern? As a person ages medical conditions such as dementia, use of prescription drugs and decreased physical functions can lead to unsafe driving. Though older drivers are relatively safe (having less accidents as age increases) they are more likely to be injured or killed due to the inability to withstand the physical trauma of an accident.

Older drivers tend to limit their driving by avoiding rush hour and night time driving, staying off the freeway and remaining at home in inclement weather.

Being aware of some of the warning signs may help you decide on the safety of your loved ones driving. These signs include but are not limited to: failure to notice traffic signs, difficulty parking within a confined space, using a “copilot”, getting lost in familiar places, riding the brake and driving at inappropriate speeds. Confusing the gas and brake pedals and stopping in traffic for no apparent reason are strong indications that a person should cease driving immediately.

Having a conversation about driving with your family member should occur (hopefully) before any incidents or accidents happen. Some key points to consider beforehand include:

- Who should broach the subject? - A spouse, adult child or other trusted family member.
- What do you want to accomplish? - a general discussion of driving, or offering rides with family members and arranging alternative transportation such as Metro Mobility, taxi or Care Team volunteers.
- A review of warning signs-noticing scrapes on the side of the car, garage or mailbox and observing their driving habits.
- Safety issues which involve everyone-the driver, passenger and other vehicles on the road.

In some cases the driver is unwilling to give up the privilege of driving; after all it is a sign of independence! Taking away the keys or disabling the car doesn't always work. Enlisting the help of the family physician, an outside agency specializing in driver evaluations or the Department of Motor Vehicles may be necessary to take this driver off the road.

Be prepared to have your conversation by doing your homework on driver warning signs, planning a time that is not threatening to the family member (such as after an accident) and being calm and direct. Plan to have several conversations over a period of time, so everyone is in agreement on when might be the right time to stop driving.

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Resources: The Hartford Insurance Co.