



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an endeavor to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Information and Referral Specialists address topics of most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions and an Information and Referral Specialist will reply.

The Dilemma of Older Drivers: Safety Vs. Independence

Driving a car is a symbol of independence and competence and is closely tied to an individual's identity. It also represents freedom and control and allows older adults to gain easy access to social connections, health care, shopping, activities and even employment. At some point, however, it is predictable that driving skills will deteriorate and individuals will lose the ability to safely operate a vehicle. Even though age alone does not determine when a person needs to stop driving, the decision must be balanced with personal and public safety.

Undoubtedly, an older adult's sense of independence vs. driving risk equals a very sensitive and emotionally charged topic. Older adults may agree with the decline of their driving ability, yet feel a sense of loss, blame others, attempt to minimize and justify, and ultimately may feel depressed at the thought of giving up driving privileges. Realizing one can no longer drive can lead to social isolation and a loss of personal or spousal independence, self-sufficiency, and even employment. In general, older drivers want to decide for themselves when to quit, a decision that often stems from the progression of medical conditions that affect vision, physical abilities, perceptions and, consequently, driving skills. There are many things that an older adult can do to be a safe driver and to participate in his or her own driving cessation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that older adults:

- Exercise regularly to increase strength and flexibility.
- Limit driving only to daytime, low traffic, short radius, clear weather
- Plan the safest route before driving and find well-lit streets, intersections with left turn arrows, and easy parking.
- Ask the doctor or pharmacist to review medicines—both prescription and over-the-counter—to reduce side effects and interactions.
- Have eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year. Wear glasses and corrective lenses as required.
- Preplan and consider alternative sources and costs for transportation and volunteer to be a passenger.

Family Caregivers Role:

Initially, it may seem cruel to take an older person's driving privilege away; however, genuine concern for older drivers means much more than simply crossing fingers in hopes that they will be safe behind the wheel. Families need to be vigilant about observing the driving behavior of older family members.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, strategies that may lead to driving cessation when less drastic measures fail include:

1. Family meetings to discuss issues and concerns
2. Disabling or removing the car
3. Filing down the keys
4. Placing an "Expired" sticker over the driver's license
5. Cancelling the vehicle registration
6. Preventing the older driver from renewing his or her driver's license
7. Speaking with the driver's doctor to write a prescription not to drive, or to schedule a formal driving assessment

Finally, it is suggested that family members learn about the warning signs of driving problems, assess independence vs. the public safety, observe the older driver behind the wheel or ride along, discuss concerns with a physician, and explore alternative transportation options.

In general, having an attitude of constant adjustment until an older individual has to face the actual moment of driving cessation seems to be a positive approach. Without recognizing the magnitude of this transition, improving the quality of life for older adults will be compromised.

The information in this article was adapted from *Driving Dilemmas: Risk vs. Independence* created by Kristine Dwyer, Staff Writer, Today's Caregiver Newsletter 2017.

Note: This is for informational purposes only.

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers with these documents, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
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