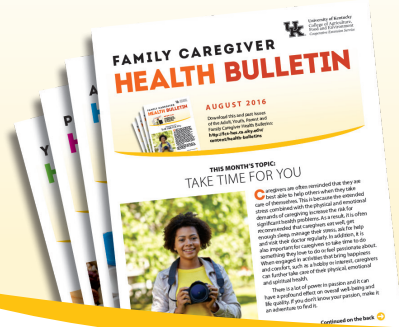


FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



JANUARY 2020

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: GIVING UP THE CAR KEYS



Driving, for many, is a way of life. It provides a sense of freedom, identity, and independence. But what if your loved one does not know when it is time to stop... or they do not want to stop? What happens when you, the caregiver, think it is time for your loved one to give up the keys?

In general, older drivers are typically safe drivers (AAA, 2019). Most follow the rules of the road, including driving the speed limit and staying off their phones. They wear seat belts and are not known for drinking and driving. But, because of normal age-related decline and/or disease, both physical and mental changes can affect their ability to drive safely. For example, older adults have greater difficulties with vision and hearing, bones may be more fragile, muscles may be weaker, and their reflexes are often

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There are alternative transportation options after giving up driving, including buses, taxis, and volunteer programs.

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slower. Because of joint or muscle pain and stiffness, older adults are more likely to take additional time to turn their heads to use their mirrors or see out the windows. It can take longer to open doors, grip or turn the steering wheel, and press the brake or accelerator (AAA, 2019). Age-related illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease and stroke can also lead to problems behind the wheel. Medical conditions can also make it more difficult for older adults to recover from injuries sustained in car crashes (AAA, 2019).

According to AAA, because "Americans are healthier and living longer than ever before, seniors are outliving their ability to drive safely by an average of seven to 10 years." In many cases, AAA acknowledges that older drivers recognize their increasing limitations and avoid situations that could lead to danger such as driving after dark, during rush hour, or in bad weather. Older adults may also be careful to avoid confusing highways and intersections (AAA, 2019).

Assess a person's abilities

When deciding to take away or surrender a driver's license, it is important to assess a person's abilities and have an honest discussion. You have to be smart and safe not only for yourself, but for others with whom you share the road. Some families turn to medical professionals to have these discussions so that they don't have to be the "bad guy" and take away the keys.

The DMV (2019) shares the following warning signs that demonstrate compromised driving:

- Difficulty changing lanes,
- Suddenly drifting into other lanes,
- Problems judging distance when braking, or
- Forgetting to use turn signals.

The following "red flags" indicate that it may be too dangerous to be operating a vehicle safely (DMV, 2019):

- Multiple incidents when an accident was close to occurring,

- New dents or scratches on the car,
- Missing stop signs or red lights,
- Collisions with stationary objects (ex. fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs),
- Collisions with other vehicles,
- An increase in traffic violations,
- Becoming lost frequently or difficulty navigating, or
- Several incidents of road rage.

Surrendering a driver's license

A driver's license can be replaced with a state identification card. You can get one at a local DMV. There is an application process and associated fees, which vary by state. If a person is no longer driving, you can also cancel auto insurance and any roadside service. You may also want to think about selling or donating the car (DMV, 2019).

Seek alternative transportation

There are alternative ways to maintain independence after giving up driving. Alternative methods of transportation may include public transportation (city buses), transportation companies (taxis, Ubers), volunteer transportation programs (available through many nonprofit organizations), and paratransit services (for people with disabilities) (DMV, 2019).

For more information about transportation services in your area, contact your local extension FCS agent and/or your local Area Agency on Aging.

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- **Social media post:** It's hard to know when a loved one shouldn't be driving anymore. We have some tips on how to know when it's time to collect someone's car keys.

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