

Adjustments keep older drivers on road

Modifications have significant impact while behind wheel

Aging drivers tackle challenges each time they get behind the wheel. They should adjust their habits, avoid distractions and remain defensive. But many don't.

Adjustments are simple and inexpensive, but more than 90% of aging drivers don't make them, according to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Pedal extensions, seat cushions and steering-wheel covers improve safety. Drivers, ages 65 and older, are more than twice as likely as younger drivers to be killed when involved in a crash. AAA recommends that seniors consider making adjustments to reduce the risk of an accident.

"While many seniors are considered to be safe drivers, they are also the most vulnerable," said Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "Our research suggests that most senior drivers are not taking advantage of simple and inexpensive features like steering-wheel covers that can greatly improve their safety and safety of others on the road."

AAA found that cushions and seat pads could improve the line of sight and help alleviate back and hip pain. Convex/multifaceted mirrors improve visibility and minimize blind spots. Pedal extension helps drivers



SENIOR ACHIEVMENT – Older drivers should adjust their driving habits to prolong their time behind the wheel. *Image: Andrey Bandurenko. Adobe Stock.*

obtain a safe distance from the steering wheel/airbag and optimize visibility. Steering-wheel covers improve the grip for drivers suffering from arthritic hand joints. And hand controls allow drivers to perform vehicle maneuvers and functions without using their lower extremities.

"When an ache or pain begins hindering driving ability, many older

drivers are able to continue driving safely after making a few adjustments," said Elin Schold, project coordinator of the American Occupational Therapy Association's Older Driver Initiative. "Occupational therapy practitioners trained in driving rehabilitation are especially valuable in connecting the dots between medical challenges that can affect driving

and the appropriate equipment and adaptations needed to remain independent in the vehicle."

Vehicle adjustments also benefit mental health by extending older drivers' time behind the wheel. Previous AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety research found that seniors, who have stopped driving, are nearly twice as likely to suffer depression and five times more likely to enter a long-term care facility than those who remain on the highways.

AAA uncovered that more than 70% of senior drivers had experienced health conditions that impact muscles. Arthritis, hip/knee replacement and joint pains were among the reasons why many had to curb their driving habits.

"It's surprising that more seniors are not utilizing simple and inexpensive vehicle adaptations when you consider the large number who are dealing with muscle and joint conditions," said Jake Nelson, AAA director of traffic safety and advocacy. "Knowledge is power when it comes to extending time behind the wheel, and AAA is committed to providing seniors with the information they need to make sound decisions."

Driving is a privilege we'd rather not give up. Adjusting your habits can keep you safe behind the wheel for a very long time.

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