

Driving and staying independent

A decision aid for older drivers



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Introduction

Driving brings a sense of independence, freedom and convenience for most people. Driving can provide a way to get to social and leisure activities, volunteer or paid work, or travel.

Most older drivers are experienced, cautious and responsible drivers. However, you can expect your driving skills will change as you age. As with legal, financial or retirement planning, it is helpful to plan for your future transport needs.

The aim of this resource

This resource provides guidance and support to make informed decisions about whether to:

- Continue safe driving
- Modify your driving routines, or
- Retire from driving.


This resource will help you consider:

- How you can keep driving safely for longer
- How you can maintain your lifestyle as you begin to drive less or retire from driving
- How to prepare for other ways to get around.

This resource is for...

All older people who drive a car – whether or not you have concerns about your driving or your health.

How to use this resource

- You will be guided through five (5) steps.
- The steps can be read at different times.
- Tick the green boxes if you agree. 
- There are lines to write your answers. _____
- Revisit this resource yearly or more often if you or others notice any changes to your driving or health.



The experiences in this resource have been adapted from interviews with older drivers. Names have been changed and stock photos are used.

Further useful information and safety tips on driving and other transport options can also be found in the *On the Road 65Plus* guide, available at www.roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/stayingsafe/ontheroad-65plus

Step 1

To help with my decision
about driving



“ Roy, 72, driver

Well, you can't see it happening. You always feel like you're young and healthy. Even though your body is aching, you still feel the same. You never think you are going to get to the point where you can't drive, so you don't even think about it.

Why do I need to think about my driving?

- Even if you feel confident driving, it is important to look out for changes to your driving skills.
- Changes to your health can affect your driving skills. Keeping a check on your health is important. If you notice changes early, you can seek timely treatment. This may help you continue safe driving for longer.
- There might come a time when you are unable to drive for some reason. Knowing your options and planning for these changes can help when this time occurs.

How do I usually get around?

I **always** drive myself and do not use any other transport options.

I **often** drive myself. I also use other transport, family, friends or walking to get around.

I **rarely** drive myself – I mainly use other ways to get around.

Other _____



My car

How safe is your car?

- Driving the safest car will lower your chance of a serious injury if you are in a crash. If you are buying a car, **choose the safest car** you can afford.
- **Aim for a five (5) star ANCAP safety rating.** Check the safety rating of your new or used car at www.ancap.com.au or www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au
- Safety features can help prevent crashes and provide protection in a crash. Many cars have crash avoidance safety features, including electronic stability control and autonomous emergency braking, that are only activated when needed.
- Other safety features such as blind spot warning and lane departure warning can improve safety by alerting a driver to a potential danger. Consider if these safety features are right for you and ensure you use them safely.
- Before you start driving ensure your mirrors, seat and seatbelt are set up correctly. This will help you drive safely and provide the best protection if you are in a crash.

How much does your car cost you?

Annual registration	\$	_____
Annual insurance	\$	_____
Service costs	\$	_____
Repairs	\$	_____
Fuel costs	\$	_____
Total cost per year	\$	_____

Taking a taxi or rideshare service could be cheaper than all the costs to run a car.

What can affect my driving skills?

Driving is a complex task. In order to drive safely, drivers rely on many skills such as:

- Reaction times
- Good reflexes
- Being able to assess the surroundings
- Memory
- Attention
- Concentration
- Judgement
- Quick decision making

It is normal for some of these skills to decline as you age. Sometimes you might not notice these changes.

Medications may also affect driving. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to check if any medications you are taking can affect your driving.

Medical conditions and declines in health can affect driving skills.

Some of these include:

- Eyesight problems
- Sleep problems
- History of falls
- Reduced strength
- Dementia
- Joint stiffness or pain
- Coordination problems
- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Heart problems
- Stroke

Have your health checked by your doctor yearly. Let them know if you or others have noticed changes to your health.

Eye conditions can cause gradual sight loss. For example, glaucoma, macular degeneration, or cataracts. Often these conditions do not show warning signs in the early stages.

Have your eyes checked by an eye care professional yearly or more often if required. This is so changes can be detected early and timely treatment can occur.

My safety on the road

Some situations are safer to drive in than others. By changing when, where, and how you drive, you can stay safe on the road. Below are some ideas.

Consider driving...

- On roads and routes that you know well
- In low traffic areas
- With extra space between you and the car in front
- With extra caution at intersections
- Where there are intersections with lights and green arrows

Limit or avoid driving...

- At night
- In busy traffic
- In bad weather
- On routes with busy intersections and roundabouts
- With distractions such as talking or the radio playing



“ John, 65, driver

I am very cautious when I drive because I know my reactions are not as quick as they have been in earlier days. I know my eyesight isn't as good. I tend to take routes that have lights or left-hand turns.

Have I or others noticed any warning signs while I am driving?

Your own driving experiences can provide early signs that your driving skills are declining.

Have you or other people noticed you are finding...

it difficult to judge the speed of other vehicles?

changing lanes difficult to do?

roundabouts difficult to use?

turning right at intersections challenging or stressful?

you are driving very slowly or too fast?

other: _____

Have you recently experienced any of the following?

A car crash, accident, or near miss

Other road users sounding their horn at you

Hitting the curb or other objects when parking or reversing

A traffic fine or demerit points

Becoming lost on short trips you know well

Applying the accelerator instead of the brake

How often have I experienced any of these warning signs?

Never

Once before

A few times in a month

Every week

If you have experienced any of these warning signs, talk to a doctor, eye care professional, driver trained occupational therapist or qualified driving instructor. They can help identify why you might be experiencing these warning signs, find treatment or help prepare you for other ways to get around.

How else could I get around?

At some point, you may need to stop driving either in the short term or permanently. Below are some ideas for other ways to get around. You might choose different options for different activities.

- **Getting help from family, a friend or a neighbour**
- **Public transport** – Buses, trains, trams or ferries
- **Mobility scooter**
- **Sharing lifts or carpooling with others**
- **Private transport** – Hire a driver or helper. Taxis or rideshare services such as Uber (discounts may be available)
- **Walk or cycle**
- **Internet** – Online shopping with delivery service. Communicating with family or friends
- **Community or volunteer transport** – Council, private, aged care providers or hospital, social or sporting club shuttle (discounts may be available)
- **Relocate or move home** – Live closer to a town centre

You may be able to apply for a Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card or a regional seniors travel card which offer transport discounts. Visit: www.transportnsw.info or www.service.nsw.gov.au/regionalseiorstravel

What are my driving options?

- Continue driving (and monitor for changes)
- Modify my driving routines
- Retire from driving

How far along am I with deciding about driving?

I have not yet thought about my options.

I am thinking about my options.

I have almost made my decision.

I have made my decision.



Step 2

Weighing up my options



Bev, 82, driver

The problem is parking wherever you go these days. So, every Thursday morning I get the community bus. It comes here around 9 o'clock and they always give me a ring to say they are on their way. When we are finished, I'm dropped off at the front of my house. The first time, I went in my car and I got there late as I couldn't find a parking spot. So, I enjoy being picked up now, it's far more relaxed.

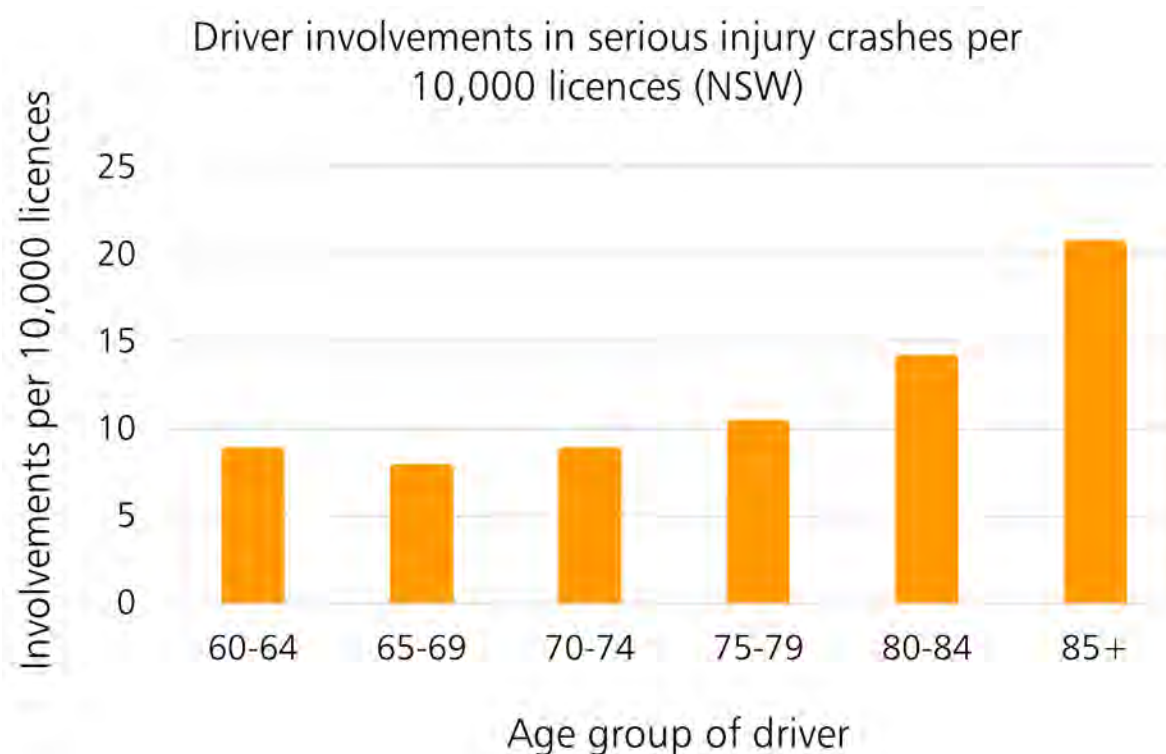
What are the risks of driving?

It is hard to determine the exact risk for each person. Your health, age, gender, car safety features and driving situations can all change your risk.

Did you know?

- The risk of serious injury or death due to a car crash increases as people get older.
- Males are more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious injury crash for all age groups.
- Intersections and driving across oncoming traffic are high-risk driving situations.

This bar chart shows that the risk of being a driver involved in a serious injury crash increases with age.



*Transport for NSW 2015 to 2019

What are the licensing requirements?

- Everyone experiences changes to their health in different ways as they get older. However, in general, advancing age coincides with an increase in medical conditions and health changes that can pose a risk to safe driving. Therefore, there are some specific requirements to renew a NSW driver licence as you get older.
- All drivers regardless of age must also advise Service NSW of any long-term illness, injury, or medical condition that may affect their ability to drive safely.

Details for renewing NSW driver licences (Class C)

From 45 years: Eyesight test every five (5) years

From 75 years: Yearly medical review with your doctor

From 85 years: Yearly medical review with your doctor and:

- A practical on-road driving assessment every two (2) years to keep your unrestricted licence

or

- You can choose a modified licence*

*A modified licence allows you to drive certain distances within your local area only. Talk to your doctor about whether this might be suitable for you. For further details talk to your local Service NSW centre, call **13 77 88**, or visit www.roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/stayingsafe/ontheroad-65plus

- If you have a medical condition or eyesight problem, there may be further requirements to renew your licence.
- The final decision to renew a person's licence is made by Service NSW.

Knowledge

There are benefits and risks to driving your car. How you feel about driving can play a part in your decision to continue, modify, or retire from driving.

Consider the following:

Benefits of driving

- Independence and freedom
- Convenience
- Pleasure of driving
- Visit family and friends
- Get to my leisure activity
- Get to paid or volunteer work

Risks of driving

- Injury to my family
- Injury to other road users
- Injury to myself
- Car crash
- Becoming lost
- Stress and anxiety while driving

Benefits of modifying or retiring from driving

- Feeling more relaxed
- Being free of stress or worry
- Feeling safer
- Saving money
- Staying independent with less risk and stress with a modified licence

Risks of modifying or retiring from driving

- Need to plan ahead
- Reduced independence, freedom
- Need help from others
- Need more time to get around
- Don't feel confident with other transport options/not familiar with how to use public transport

The most important reasons for me to continue driving

Tick the four (4) most important reasons to continue driving.

Independence and freedom

Convenience

Getting to work, volunteering or family responsibilities

Visiting family or friends

Going to appointments or shopping

Going on holidays

Poor access to public transport

Not wanting to rely on others for help

Other _____

The most important reasons for me to modify my driving or retire from driving

Tick the four (4) most important reasons to modify or retire from driving.

Risk of a car crash

Risk of injury to others

Risk of injury to me

Risk of a crash leading to death

Family or friends are worried

Feeling anxious while driving or not enjoying it

Health problems or advice from my health professional

Save money by not using my car

Other _____



Steve, 87, driver

One experience I saw had quite an effect on me. I was on my way home from golf. I had driven down this street hundreds of times. The driver in front was crossing right in front of oncoming traffic.

The crash happened so fast in slow motion. They couldn't have seen the oncoming traffic. The driver was my age. He had to be cut free from the car and taken to hospital. I couldn't drive myself home after seeing that, and I don't drive as often anymore.

Step 3

What else do I need to make my decision?



“

Sue, 67, daughter of a retired driver

My Mum was part of a ladies 9-hole golf group. After their game of golf, they always had lunch. Mum had retired from driving, and she also lost her ability to play golf. But her friends would still take her down every Wednesday to have lunch. So, using your network of friends or family can help to keep you part of things.

Support

Is anyone else involved with my decisions about driving?

How can they support me?

Which option do they prefer me to do?

Continue driving (and monitor for changes)

Modify my driving routines

Retire from driving

I am unsure

Am I feeling pressured about this decision?

Yes

No

What role do I prefer in making this decision?

I prefer to decide for myself.

I prefer to let someone else decide.

I prefer to share the decision with others.

Knowledge

The contacts below can provide you with more information about your health, driving or transport needs.

My health and driving

For information about your health and driving talk to:

A doctor or eye care professional (optometrist or ophthalmologist)

For help to maintain your strength and movement contact:

A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist

For information and advice about your on-road driving skills talk to a:

Driving assessor for older drivers – visit:

www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/find-older-driver-assessor

Driver trained occupational therapist on **1300 682 878**

www.aboutoccupationaltherapy.com.au/driving/

Licensing and road rules

For information about modified licences or renewing your licence call **137 788** or visit: www.roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/staying-safe/ontheroad-65plus/

For information on road rules visit:

www.roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/aboutthecentre/roadrules/

Transport options and subsidies

For information about on-demand, private or community transport options or the taxis transport subsidy scheme call **131 500**

visit: www.transportnsw.info/travel-info/ways-to-get-around

For information about the regional senior travel card visit:

www.service.nsw.gov.au/regionalseniorstravel

For general transport or Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card information, call:

Transport for NSW on **131 500** or visit:

www.opal.com.au/en/about-opal/opal_for_senior_pensioners/

For further information about driving and transport visit: On the road 65Plus

www.roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/staying-safe/ontheroad-65plus

Step 4

Making my decision:
What is the best option for me?



“ Robert, 86, retired driver

At first, it was hard when I retired from driving because I was relying on others to take me. But it's okay, I've had to accept it, and either I don't go or I accept someone's help. This way I still get to do the things I enjoy.

How confident am I with making this decision?

Do I know my options?

Yes No

Do I know the **benefits** and **risks** of each option?

Yes No

Am I clear about which benefits and risks **matter most** to me?

Yes No

Do I have enough **support** and **advice** to make a choice?

Yes No

Do I **feel sure** about the best choice for me?

Yes No

Do I feel I am being forced by others to make a change?

Yes No



“ Robyn, 68, driver

If I could no longer drive, we wouldn't be able to live where we are. We have thought about this in our retirement plans. We would move into town or go to a retirement village where they have buses. But socially for me, it wouldn't really make any difference not driving.

Questions

Do you have further questions before you decide? You might want to discuss these with your doctor, health professional, family or friend.

1. _____

2. _____

My decision

Now that you have read this resource, what have you decided?

I would like to...

Continue driving (and monitor for changes)

Modify my driving routines

Retire from driving

I am unsure

If you are still unsure, talk to others who have made the decision or are in a similar situation.

Support

You might find it helpful to seek advice and support from the contacts below.

My doctor, specialist or nurse

My eye care professional (optometrist or ophthalmologist)

Driver trained occupational therapist

Physiotherapist/exercise physiologist

My family, a friend or a neighbour _____

My lawyer to assist with my legal and retirement planning. Consider also discussing your future transport needs

Someone else I trust _____

Beyond Blue on **1300 22 4636** or www.beyondblue.org.au
For mental health and wellbeing support

Step 5

Now that I have decided



“

Lyn, 67, driver

I think I could manage quite well without driving because I am reasonably independent without a car. I'm already using the bus and taxis. I also have my friend I could ask.

Now that I have decided to continue driving, I will...

1. Regularly check my health

Visit my doctor and eye care professional for regular check-ups

Monitor changes to my health and on-road driving skills

Take steps to maintain or improve my health, strength and coordination

For ideas visit www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au

2. Try the driving tips below to stay safe on the road

Practise driving to maintain my driving skills. It is helpful to do this, even if your spouse or partner is the main driver

Take a refresher on-road driving lesson

Allow extra space between my car and other cars

Take extra care at intersections or driving across oncoming traffic

Avoid driving if I am tired

Drive an automatic car instead of a manual car

Avoid in-car distractions, for example, talking or loud radio playing

3. Also consider the options below

Drive the safest car I can afford

Seek feedback from family or someone I trust about my driving

Try non-driving transport options to get to some activities

Review the checklist for 'modify' my driving. These ideas can also help to keep you safe on the road while you continue driving.

Now that I have decided to modify my driving, I will...

Complete the checklist for 'continue driving' and choose from the list below

Drive during the day and limit driving at night

Drive at off-peak times

Drive in local areas I know well

Avoid driving in bad weather such as heavy rain and fog

Allow extra space and time when turning right across oncoming traffic

Choose routes with lights at intersections and green arrows to turn right

Plan my trips ahead of time

Other: _____

Also consider the options below

Try non-driving transport options to get to my activities

Talk to my doctor or Service NSW about the option of a modified licence

My non-driving options

It is helpful to plan for your future transport needs. If you were unable to drive, how else would you get to your activities?

Activities

How will I get there without driving myself?

Now that I have decided to retire from driving...

Retiring from driving can be more relaxing for some people, making you feel safer and free of stress. However, some people experience feelings of loss. Keep in mind there are support services that can help you.

You may need to plan your day ahead or ask others for help to get to your activities. Some people find it hard to ask for help. You could return the favour for the help you receive, for example, pay for lunch or petrol, or offer to help some other way.

Try out your preferred non-driving options in advance. This can help prepare you for the change. If you find it hard to use public transport, consider asking someone you trust to help you.

If you decide to hand in your licence, you will need to visit a Service NSW centre. For more information visit www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/surrender-nsw-driver-or-rider-licence-voluntarily or call **13 77 88**

You can talk to Service NSW about obtaining a photo card to replace your licence. To enquire call **13 77 88**

My non-driving options

You can review the information and support services in Steps 3 and 4.

On the lines below, list your preferred transport options for your activities. Is there someone you can ask for help to get around?

Activities

How will I get there without driving myself?

Miscellaneous

Acknowledgements: This resource was developed by a team of key advisors. These include older drivers, practitioners from; general practice, optometry, nursing, occupational therapy, academics from; law, human geography, marketing and transport industry representatives. The project team would like to thank older drivers, retired older drivers, optometrists, orthoptists, ophthalmologists, physiotherapists, general practitioners, general practice nurses, driver trained occupational therapists, geriatricians, family members of older drivers, road safety officers and transport industry representatives who provided their experiences and views on this topic or provided feedback on the draft resource. We acknowledge John Paul Troiani Multicultural Health Service (ISLHD), James Hurnall (ANCAP Safety) and Professor D. Stacey for their insights and suggestions.

Driving Change Collaboration: The resource was developed from the guidance and advice of two advisory groups.

Community advisory group

Sue Izatt, Helen Woodward, John Stewart, Jennifer-Robyn Mattock, and others who prefer to remain anonymous.

Professional, industry and academic advisory group

Honorary Professor D. Pond BA(hons) Dip Ed MBBS Dip SocSci FRACGP PhD (UON); Senior Professor G. Waitt MA(H1) PhD, Associate Professor J. Rhee BSc(Med) MBBS(Hons) GCULT PhD FRACGP, K. Murray BA/LLB(Hons), Senior Professor M. Randle BAAAdmin MB(Mkt) PhD, N. Veerhuis BSc MPH, Dr T. Harada BEd BSc(Hons) PhD, Professor T. Mundy PhD LLB AssDipComOrg, Professor V. Traynor BSc(Hons) PhD RGN PGHCE, C. Andrew BaScOT MaOHR MPhil CPE (UOW); Dr M. Coleman Bsc (Hons) MRes PhD (UniMelb); G. Routh BlntSt BASS(Hons), G. Castles BA GDipHlthProm, L.Fong BA-PsychLLB, R. Kelly B SportCoach&ExerciseSc/B HumanNutr, S. Millward BA MLIS, S. Kon BA GDipHlthProm (Transport for NSW); S. Izatt (community representative).

Funding: Financial support was provided by Transport for NSW through the NSW Community Road Safety Fund.

Conflicts of Interest: Neither the authors nor their affiliated organisations stand to gain financially from the use of this resource.

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If using for study or training purposes, please acknowledge the University of Wollongong.

Guided by: International Patient Decision Aid Standards (Joseph-Williams et al., 2014); The Ottawa Decisional Support Framework (Stacey et al., 2020); The Ottawa Personal Decision Guide (O'Connor et al., 2015); Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective. Part 9: Material for older adults (McGee 2010).

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Other references including systematic reviews are available on request at www.adhere.org.au

Last reviewed: October 2021

Next review: October 2026

Reading level: Flesch Kincaid Grade Level 7.9

Flesch Kincaid Grade Level 5.5 (excluding Miscellaneous section)

Suggested citation: Driving Change Collaboration (2021). *Driving and staying independent: A decision aid for older drivers.* University of Wollongong, Australia.



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