

# Driving Safety and Aging



These materials were put together by a group of researchers and practitioners in New Brunswick who work with older adults. Our aim was to help older adults in New Brunswick navigate the complex landscape of information, services, forms, and resources. We hope that you will find this helpful. This guide was last updated in December 2023.

[www.stu.ca/aging-in-nb/](http://www.stu.ca/aging-in-nb/)

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Healthy older adults are some of the safest drivers on the road. Many people can drive safely throughout their whole lives. But there are a number of health issues that can come with aging that impact driving safety (e.g., Dementia, Stroke, Parkinson's disease, vision problems).



**Tip:** As we age, we experience changes such as flexibility, range of motion, and even height. CarFit is a program that promotes safe driving by teaching you how to fit your car to you. To learn more about CarFit, visit [https://caot.ca/site/prac-res/carfit?language=en\\_CA&](https://caot.ca/site/prac-res/carfit?language=en_CA&) or Google "CAOT carfit".

**Driving and Dementia:** People with dementia may still be safe to drive in the early stages of the disease. However, they will need to stop driving at some point. Knowing when it is no longer safe to drive and making a plan can make this change easier for you and the people who care for you. For more information go to [www.drivinganddementia.ca](http://www.drivinganddementia.ca).

## When should I stop driving? What are the warning signs?

**To check your driving safety, ask yourself and those close to you, the following questions:**

- Have you had any car crashes or near misses in the past year?
- Have you been getting lost while driving?
- Have you been missing stop signs or ignoring other traffic signs?
- Do other drivers honk or pass you often?
- Is it hard for you to keep up with the flow of traffic?
- Have others made comments about your driving habits lately?
- Have there been changes in your driving? Do you need someone to go with you so you don't get lost?

*This guide is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical, legal, or financial advice. Programs and information can change over time, so please check details with the services and agencies mentioned in these documents. [Last update, December 2023]*

- Do you have a hard time working the brake and gas pedals?
- Are you driving less often because you are becoming more nervous?
- Is it more difficult to drive on roads with curves or to stay in the middle of your lane?
- Do you forget to use your blinker and check your mirrors when changing lanes?

**If the answer was “yes” to any of the above, it is a good time to think about stopping driving.**

### **What to do if I think I may no longer be safe to drive?:**

- Talk to your family members or trusted friends. Have a one-on-one conversation about your concerns.
- Talk with your doctor about your concerns.
- Take a lesson or be retested. Local driving schools offer driving refresher courses for older adults. To find local driving schools in your area, look in your local yellow pages, visit [http://find-a-driving-school.ca/new\\_brunswick/](http://find-a-driving-school.ca/new_brunswick/), or Google “driving schools” in your area.

## **How can I prepare for the future?**

### **Limiting Driving:**

- Drive only routes you are used to.
- Try not to drive during rush hour. Try to drive only between the hours of 10:00 and 3:00.
- Try not to drive at night or when it is very sunny. These conditions can make it hard to see.
- Try not to drive at dawn and dusk. These are times when animals are most likely to be on the road.
- Try not to drive in bad weather.
- Try to avoid busy roads. Take a longer route if it means less traffic.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you should be back.
- Get rid of distractions: Turn off the radio. Don’t eat or drink while driving. Don’t drive when upset. Don’t use your cell phone while driving. Try not to drive with pets in the car, or make sure they are in a carrier case.
- If you get lost, pull off the road into a safe space to figure out next steps.
- Plan your trip ahead of time. Map out your route and give yourself enough time

- to avoid rushing. Group your outings (e.g. grocery and drug store), and plan appointments for the same day to reduce travel. Plan your route so you can make right turns into your destination and avoid crossing traffic by making left turns.
- Talk to your pharmacist about changes in your medications that may impact your driving.
  - Get your vision and hearing checked.

### **Creating a Plan to stop driving:**

If driving safety is becoming a problem, it is important to have a plan for when you will no longer be able to drive. Having information on transportation, delivery services, and other community resources can make it easier when you stop driving. Use the following suggestions to help you get started:

- Have open and honest conversations about driving with friends, family, and your doctor.
- Make a list of the people you can call on to get a drive to social and medical appointments.
- List the events that are priorities, and make sure regular, reliable transportation is available for those events.
- See if there are any public transit options in your area. If so, learn how to use them.
- See if any drug stores, supermarkets and stores offer delivery in your area.
- Find out if there is a “ride share” program in your community.
- If you go to church or other religious services, see if they offer transportation to services and events.
- Talk with other older drivers who have stopped driving and ask about how they found people to help with the driving. Ask them about how they adjusted to the emotional impact of not driving.
- Write an Advanced Directive for Stopping Driving. This involves writing a letter of agreement stating that when the time comes when it is no longer reasonable to drive, that you will stop driving. Sign and date the letter and give copies to your family.

## Caregivers

### **IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT AN OLDER PERSON'S DRIVING:**

It is common for people to feel sad, depressed, isolated, angry, or frustrated at the idea of not being allowed to drive. This is often a very difficult change in people's lives. Think about how you would feel! When talking about your concerns, it is important to be patient, calm, and to let the person talk about their feelings and concerns.

Use this checklist of warning signs as a guide before starting a conversation about driving. If you feel safe enough, go for a drive with the older driver and make mental notes about the following issues. After the drive, write down the date and what you noticed. Look for patterns over time. Pay attention to when and how often you notice the following:

- Decrease in confidence or increased agitation while driving
- Difficulty turning to see when backing up
- Always has their foot on the brake
- Easily distracted while driving
- Other drivers often honking their horns
- Problems with signaling or trouble navigating turns
- Difficulty parking within a parking space
- Hitting curbs
- Noticing scrapes or dents on the car
- Failure to notice important traffic signs
- Driving at inappropriate speeds
- Needs to use a "co-pilot"
- Near misses or car accidents
- Hard time staying in the middle of the lane
- Getting traffic tickets or warnings when driving
- Getting lost in familiar places

### **IF YOU HAVE WATCHED THEIR DRIVING AND ARE CONCERNED, YOU CAN TAKE ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING STEPS:**

#### **See if they will agree to stop driving.**

- Have a calm conversation and talk about your fear for their safety and the safety of others. This can be a difficult thing to do. Sometimes people won't understand that they are unsafe to drive and will be angry with you. In this case, you can also 'stay on their side' and ask their doctor, a driving school, or the Department of Public Safety to be the ones to step in.

#### **Talk with the person's doctor or nurse practitioner about your concern.**

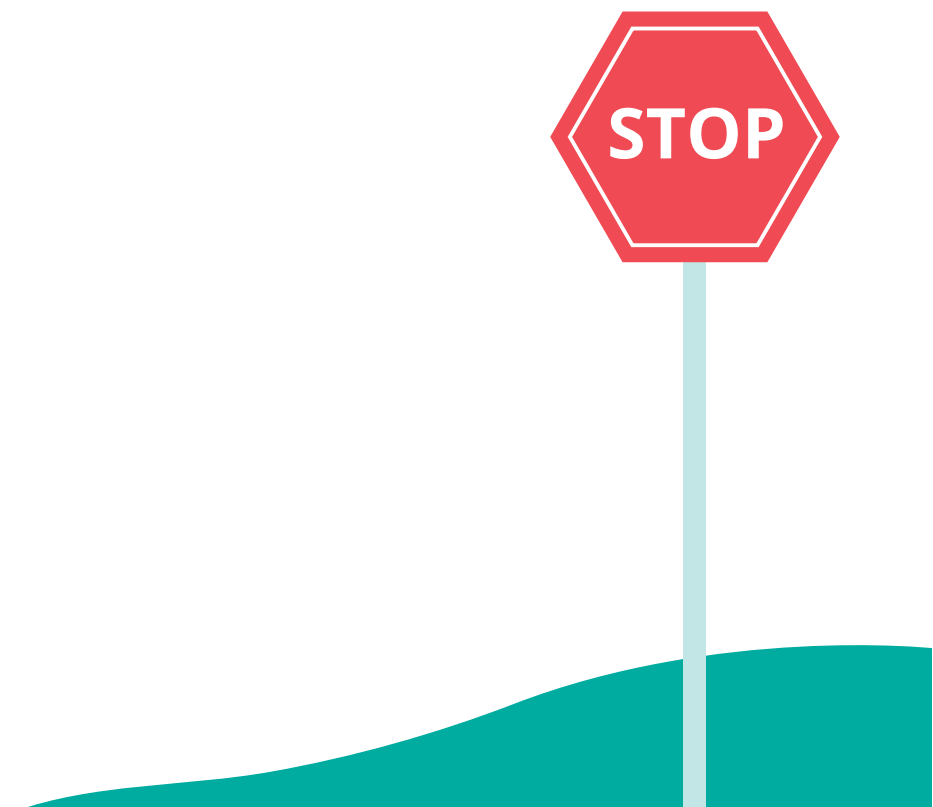
- The doctor or nurse practitioner can tell the person to stop driving or can send the person for tests to see if they are fit to drive.

**Ask the person to take a driver's test or a refresher course.**

- To find local driving schools in your area, look in your local yellow pages, visit [http://find-a-driving-school.ca/new\\_brunswick/](http://find-a-driving-school.ca/new_brunswick/), or Google "driving schools" in your area.

**If none of the above work and it is clear that the person is not safe to drive, you can report them to the to the Department of Public Safety in writing.**

- The Department of Public Safety does not act on complaints made by phone and requires the written complaint to include:
  - Details of the concerns with specific events and dates
  - The name, date of birth and address of the unsafe driver
  - Name, address and phone number of the person making the complaint
  - The written complaint must be signed and dated
  - **Note that it is possible for the driver to find out from the Department of Public Safety who reported them.**



## Caregivers

### WHAT TO DO WHEN THE PERSON'S DRIVER'S LICENCE HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY, BUT THEY WON'T STOP DRIVING?:

- Distract them when they want to drive.
- Suggest you will go for a drive later.
- Ask a friend to take the person for a drive.
- Explain why they do not need to go out in the car right now (e.g. "we can go visit them later, they are at work right now" or "let's plan to go to the store in a couple hours after I finish doing this").
- Remind the driver that they do not have a valid licence and that it is illegal to drive without one.
- Remind the person that if they are in an accident their insurance will not cover any costs.
- Ask the person's doctor to write a letter outlining why they can no longer drive.
- Remove the keys and the car from the person's view.

The Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick has useful resources to support caregivers of people with dementia. Call **1-800-664-8411** and ask what they can offer for help or check out their online resources:

- <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-living-dementia/managing-changes-your-abilities/driving-dementia> (or Google "Alzheimer driving with dementia")
- <https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/DrivingDementiaToolkit.pdf> (or Google "The driving and dementia toolkit")