

## Knowing When to Give Up the Car Keys

Manpreet K. Boparai, PharmD, CGP, BCACP, and Beatriz Korc-Grodzicki, MD

In addition to being a convenience and an enjoyable activity for many people, driving is also a symbol of one's independence. As we age, there are a numerous factors that can affect our driving skills, and hinder our ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. In 2009, there were 33 million licensed drivers aged 65 and older in the United States, which is a 23% increase from 1999. Driving helps older adults stay mobile and independent. But the risk of being injured or killed increases as one ages. An average of 500 older adults are injured every day in crashes.

### If I am taking a medication, is it OK to drive?

Most likely yes, but the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises that it's best to be absolutely sure before you get behind the wheel. While most medications don't affect driving ability, some prescriptions and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines can cause reactions that may make it unsafe to drive. These reactions may include:

- Sedation/drowsiness
- Nausea/vomiting
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Slowed movement
- Fainting
- Inability to focus or pay attention
- Excitability

### Medications that may require caution:

- Anxiety medication
- Some antidepressants
- Products containing codeine (Tylenol #3)
- Some cold remedies and allergy medicines (Benaryl®)
- Benzodiazepines
- Narcotics (opioids)
- Sleeping pills

Physicians and pharmacists can tell you about known side effects of



medications, including those that interfere with driving.

### Can I drive during chemotherapy?

Evaluate whether it's safe to drive while on chemotherapy the same way you

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#### EDITORIAL STAFF

Manpreet K. Boparai, PharmD  
Beatriz Korc-Grodzicki, MD, PhD

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If you would like to make a tax-deductible gift to support MSKCC's 65+ Program, please call 646-888-3154.

#### ABOUT THE 65+ PROGRAM

A diagnosis of cancer is difficult at any age, but older patients face unique challenges. Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center is committed to providing cancer patients aged 65 and older with the treatment and support they need. The 65+ Program offers the services of a multidisciplinary geriatric team, including physicians, clinical nurse specialists, social workers, nutritionists, pharmacists, and psychiatrists, as well as members of the Pain and Palliative Care Service and the Integrative Medicine Service. The programs and care provided focus on the unique needs of cancer patients aged 65 years and older.

If you would like more information about the 65+ Program or a referral to one of our team members, please call 646-888-4741.

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make other safe driving decisions. One way to do this is to envision a neighborhood with kids playing baseball. The ball gets thrown into the street and a little boy chases it. The question to ask yourself is, Would I be able to respond without hesitation and avoid hurting him and myself? Even though you may feel comfortable driving to doctor appointments, it's usually best to have someone drive you to your chemotherapy appointment, or use public transportation and taxis.

### How can I tell whether a loved one should be driving?

Consider bringing up the issue with your loved one's physician or suggest a DMV reexamination. A DMV reexamination is when a person's driving skills must be reevaluated based on one or more factors, including the driver's physical or mental condition, or driving record. Unsafe drivers may be reported to the DMV either by a physician during a routine examination or by other citizens. Forms filled out by citizens reporting unsafe drivers must be signed by a notary and sent to:

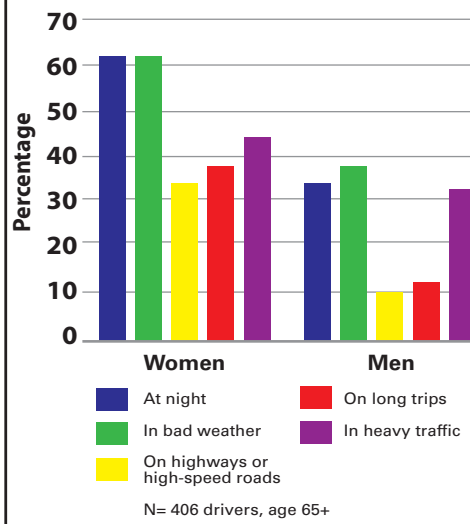
Driver Improvement Bureau  
NYS Department of Motor Vehicles

cles

6 Empire State Plaza  
Room 220A  
Albany, NY12228

This will only result in reexamination of licensure. In some circumstances, older drivers may have a restriction placed on their driver license. The types of restrictions vary, and are based on the results of a vision test, driving test, and the driving examiner's assessment. A restricted driver's license is intended to ensure that you are driving within your abilities. Above is a graph showing under which specific conditions older drivers choose to avoid driving.

### Older Adult Drivers Who Tend to Avoid Driving under Specific Conditions by Gender



### Age-related changes that may affect driving fitness

- Decreased physical capabilities, including declining muscle tone, flexibility, and reaction time
- Decreased hearing and visual acuity
- Increased fragility, resulting in longer time to heal should injuries occur
- Increased medication use with possible side effect of drowsiness

### Common traffic violations among older drivers leading to crashes

- Failure to obey traffic signals, including stop signs and red lights
- Unsafe left turns (driver may inaccurately judge speed of oncoming vehicle)
- Inappropriate turns (such as difficulty judging distance from oncoming cars, wide or narrow turns, or not timing the turn correctly with traffic lights)
- Unsafe passing
- Failure to yield

### Tips to Stay Safe

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines (both prescription and over-the-counter) to reduce possible side effects and drug interactions.
- Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year, and wear your glasses and contact lenses as required.
- Plan your route before you drive.
- Leave a large following distance behind the car in front of you.
- Avoid distractions in your car, such as listening to a loud radio, talking on your cell phone, texting, and eating. Consider potential alternatives to driving, such as riding with a friend or using public transit that you could use to get around.

#### References:

Herrmann N, Rapoport MJ, Sambrook R, et al. Predictors of driving cessation in mild-to-moderate dementia. CMAJ 2006;175(6): 531-43.  
Hedlund J. Countermeasures that work: a highway safety countermeasure guide for state highway safety offices. Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; 2006.

### Lectures/Workshops 65+Program Upcoming Events

Physical Therapy and  
Wellness Workshop  
Featuring Department of  
Rehabilitation staff

**When and Where:**  
**Tuesday, October 8, 2013**

**10 AM-2 PM**  
1275 York Ave (at 68th Street),  
Room M107

No registration required.

For more information, please call  
**646-888-4741**