

Driving and Community Mobility

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



I am not sure if my husband should be driving. Who can help me decide if he is OK to continue, and if he isn't, what options do we have?

One key to safety is knowing when we or another driver are at increased risk for a crash or unsafe driving. Self-assessment screens offer opportunities to better understand individual changes and how they might affect driving. Here are a variety of self-assessment options and resources:

- AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, www.seniordrivers.org
- AARP Driver Safety Program, http://www.aarp.org/families/driver_safety/
- American Occupational Therapy Association, www.aota.org/olderdriver
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, www.nhtsa.gov
- UMTRI Driving Decisions Workgroup, <http://www.umtri.umich.edu/library/pdf/2000-14.pdf>

If you are concerned about the results of these informal self-assessments or screens, or if you would prefer an individualized assessment, you should seek a formal driving check-up from an occupational therapy driving rehabilitation specialist.

Occupational therapists with specialized training in driver rehabilitation are able to identify not only a driver's strengths

but also the physical, visual, and cognitive challenges that he or she faces. As a result, occupational therapists can evaluate an individual's overall ability to operate a vehicle safely and, if needed, recommend ways to limit risks.

Not all driver rehabilitation specialists are occupational therapists. But occupational therapists have the extensive knowledge and training needed to recognize the impact of medical conditions and the aging process on driving performance. They use skill-building, behavioral, and adaptive approaches to keep a person mobile in his or her community, even if he or she must limit or stop driving (see next page for more information on resources on www.aota.org/olderdriver).

What is occupational therapy (OT)?

Occupational therapy is concerned with an individual's ability to do and to participate in desired daily life activities, or *occupations*. Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants help individuals learn the necessary skills for the job of living despite impairments, activity limitations, and restrictions in

participation or despite risks for these problems. Occupational therapy engages individuals in everyday activities that are important to them in those environments in which they are expected to do them, as a means to promote physical, cognitive, and emotional health and function.

What is the difference between a driver rehabilitation specialist and an occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant who provides driver rehabilitation services?

A driver rehabilitation specialist may be a certified driver rehabilitation specialist/allied health professional who specializes in driver rehabilitation or an occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant with advanced training and experience in driver rehabilitation. The occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants who are driving rehabilitation specialists possess the ability to consider the impact of the aging process or a client's disability or medical conditions during the driving rehabilitation process.

I'm 82 and think that it may be time to retire from driving. If I stop driving, what are my options?

If you decide on your own or in consultation with an occupational therapist to retire from driving, many towns and cities have transportation options for older adults. Your occupational therapist can help you locate a program that meets your needs. Some transportation systems are informal (such as neighbors who give rides to others), and other, more formal systems provide bus, taxi, or van services. To discuss the options that may be available for you, contact your local Senior Information and Assistance Office, the Eldercare Locator Service (800-677-1116 or www.eldercare.gov), or Easter Seals Project Action (800-659-6428 or <http://projectaction.easterseals.com>).

My sister has arthritis and wants to keep driving. We think that she could continue to drive safely for a while longer if she could find equipment that would help her get into and out of the car. Where can we find devices that would make getting in and out of the car easier for her?

A variety of tools are available that enable individuals to drive safely longer. These adaptive features can be added to a vehicle to help compensate for an individual's physical changes or functional loss or simply to make the vehicle fit the person more comfortably and safely. Some commonly available devices include a seat cushion (to raise line of sight 3" above the steering wheel) or a built-up key holder.

Although many businesses sell adaptive equipment, people who need specialized equipment should have a thorough assessment by an occupational therapy driving rehabilitation specialist to ensure that the right equipment is selected (such as steering knobs and hand controls). In addition, the specialist can help make sure that the equipment is properly installed and can provide training on using the equipment before the person takes to the road in a vehicle.

For more information, visit the NHTSA Web page, "Automotive Safety Issues for Persons With Disabilities," <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/adaptive/>. Includes adaptive equipment articles, brochures, regulations, standards, and a questionnaire.

Do people have to give up driving in later life?

Driving is a complex skill. The ability to drive safely can be affected by changes in our physical, emotional, and cognitive functioning. Many of those changes

take place as we get older. Although age alone is not a good predictor of driving safety or ability, safety research clearly has shown that declines in our physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities can signal a greater crash or unsafe-driving risk. If you have conditions that may affect your driving ability, consult with an occupational therapy driver rehabilitation specialist for evaluation, training, and recommendations.

Who pays for driver rehabilitation services?

Insurance reimbursement varies from policy to policy and from state to state. Consult your insurance company for more information. However, driver rehabilitation services are commonly paid for by individuals themselves or their families.

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To locate a driving rehabilitation specialist, visit the Web site below, and click "Finding a Driving Specialist."

<http://www.aota.org/olderdriver>

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