

Dear Age Sage,

I love to drive. My entire working career was driving; delivery trucks, school buses, I even drove a tank in World War II, and I can't count how many times I drove to and from Florida. Now, my children are after me to give up my keys. You might as well put me in a box and bury me! I feel humiliated, old, and helpless. Can you give me any thoughts to take to the upcoming "family meeting" that has been called to discuss this? And, oh by the way, any chance you can give me a ride?

Soon to be stuck at home....

Dear Soon to be stuck:

As we get older, we learn that we have to accept some annoyances, like always needing to know where the nearest bathroom is, waking up at 3am and not being able to fall back to sleep, and not being able to eat some of our favorite foods. These are all well and good; a little annoying, but most of us manage to put up with them. But driving is another story. Driving is our key to independence. Giving up driving can feel like the last concession.

The most common causes of unsafe driving by older adults includes vision impairment, cognitive limitations, side effects of medications, slower reaction times, muscular difficulties and limited range of motion.

So let's look at some ways to approach this:

1. Start to taper off your driving – don't drive at night, long distances, and maybe even avoid highway driving.
2. Begin to look for ways to not use your car, while you still have it – try walking to the store, library, etc. if you can. – this is a great way to get that exercise that you know you need. Think about buying a walking stick if that will make you feel more secure on your feet.
3. Talk to an occupational therapist trained in driver rehabilitation about adaptive equipment. www.aota.org
4. Take AARP's Driver Safety Program geared to drivers age 50 and over. www.AARP.org
5. Check out taxis and the bus routes in your area. Find a friend to go with you.
6. Give your car to one of your grandchildren in exchange for some free chauffeuring.
7. Find an organization that will provide transportation for you. www.caremanager.org
8. Honestly evaluate yourself looking at AARP's Warning Signs when someone should begin to limit driving or stop altogether:
 - Feeling less comfortable and more nervous or fearful while driving.

- Difficulty staying in the lane of traffic.
- More frequent "close calls" (i.e. almost crashing).
- More frequent dents, scratches, on the car, or on fences, mailboxes, garage doors, curbs etc.
- Trouble judging gaps in traffic at intersections and on highway entrance/exit ramps.
- Other drivers honking at you more often; more instances when you are angry at other drivers.
- Friends or relatives not wanting to drive with you.
- Getting lost more often.
- Difficulty seeing the sides of the road while looking straight ahead (i.e. cars or people seem to come "out of nowhere" more frequently).
- Trouble paying attention to or violating signals, road signs and pavement markings.
- Slower response to unexpected situations; trouble moving foot from gas to brake pedal or confusing the two pedals.
- Easily distracted or hard to concentrate while driving.
- Hard to turn around to check over shoulder while backing up or changing lanes.
- Medical conditions or medications that may be increasingly affecting your ability to handle the car safely.
- More traffic tickets or "warnings" by traffic or law enforcement officers in the last year or two.

TIP:

If you feel your parents are no longer safe driving, approach this subject gently. Make sure it really is time – curtailing their driving before it is really necessary has shown to increase their sense of isolation which undermines their quality of life and accelerates health decline. Be respectful and kind (not patronizing) when you bring this subject up. Losing the keys to their cars is the last in a long series of acts that destroy illusion and reveal inadequacy.

Try to have some hard evidence supporting this decision; like the doctor strongly suggests this due to a medical condition, the Department of Motor Vehicles strongly suggests this, due to their getting yet another driving violation.

Try to have this be a joint decision, made intelligently for the safety of all (older driver and innocent others that may be in their route).

As we always have to remind ourselves, let's see how easy it will be for us to give up those keys.

Until next month,

The Age Sage

Please contact me: theagesage@extended-family.net

www.extended-family.net