

Driving conversations

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I was fortunate when my 85-year old mother recognized on her own that it was time to give up her driver's license. After her cataract operation she had no desire to drive. In fact, my mother now enjoys being chauffeured, just like Miss Daisy. As a caregiver, one of the many difficult issues you may face is when and how to start the conversation about driver safety. Taking the keys away from a parent or spouse is not easy.

Age may not be the only reason why someone should stop driving, but for many people it is certainly an important factor. According to Statistics Canada, although "most seniors drive carefully, statistics show that people aged 70 or older have a higher accident rate per kilometre driven than any other age group except young male drivers, still the highest risk category."

Age in and of itself does not mean older people should necessarily give up their license, and many older people are excellent drivers. But with age, certain conditions may develop that do interfere with the ability to drive safely and well.

For many people, for example, problems with vision increase as they age. Older people may not see things as clearly as they once did, and they may find driving at night difficult. Cataracts, macular degeneration, and glaucoma are all age-related conditions that can affect how clearly we are able to see and, therefore, the ability to drive safely.

Of course driving safely and well not only requires good eyesight, but also dexterity, agility, and a certain level of physical strength. Conditions such as Alzheimer's, heart disease, and diabetes can result in physical limitations that will affect a person's driving abilities. If you notice a decline in a person's ability to do



everyday tasks, it might be the time to see if these changes are also affecting their driving.

If you have concerns, ride with the person and observe his or her physical ability to control the vehicle. Simply observe without nagging or distraction. Are they staying within the lane? How do they handle turns? Do they pay attention to the speed limit? In trying to drive safely, do they perhaps drive too slowly? Do they have the ability to scan from left to right?

Later, have a candid talk with them. Discuss your concerns and see if they will volunteer to give up their license.

If you are concerned and they refuse to give up the keys, talk to their physician or eye specialist; they can write a medical report to the Department of Motor Vehicles. Depending on the information in the doctor's report, Motor Vehicles may suspend the license immediately or they might require further medical or road testing.

Keeping active and social are important. If your spouse or parent gives up their license, find other ways to make trips to see friends or to visit the library, barbershop, hairdresser, or grocery store. In many places there are taxis and public transportation, or friends and relatives can be asked to help with transportation. Don't let giving up a driver's license negatively impact the person's life. 4