

A guide to road safety for older drivers

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Scotland has an ageing population and many people are continuing to use the car in later years, for work, family, community commitments and convenience.

According to the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM Roadsmart), there are now over 1.65 million people who hold full driving licences over the age of 80 in the UK. In addition, the number of motorists over the age of 70 is likely to double over the next 20 years.

Changes in your eyesight, slower reaction times and medications can affect driving. As a result, you may find you start to avoid driving at night, use the car less, drive shorter distances along quieter routes, and generally avoid motorway driving where possible.

It is important to make sure that, whenever you get in the car, you are still able to drive safely. Regular eye examinations are one way to keep everyone safer on the roads. You do not have to wait until you are due for your next eye examination if you notice changes in your vision.

Read on for more useful information on driving safely for as long as you can.





A recent statistic shows how important it is to have the best vision you can for the road.

- **29% of car driver casualties killed or seriously injured in road collisions in 2022, were aged over 60**

Source: STATS19 Injury Collision Database, Transport Scotland 2022

Top tips for safer driving

There are things you can do to keep driving safely for as long as you can.

1 Get a regular eye examination – changes in your eyesight can be a gradual process and may go unnoticed, so it is important to have a regular eye examination. If you notice a change in your vision, get in touch with your community optometry practice (opticians) right away. This will not only ensure you have the right glasses or contact lenses for driving, but also flag up common age-related conditions, such as cataracts and glaucoma. These can greatly reduce the ability to see clearly, especially when driving at night, in bad weather or in conditions where visibility is poor.

2 Use hearing aids – if you usually wear a hearing aid at home, use it when driving too. Any kind of sensory loss can lead to feeling confused and disconnected from your surroundings.

3 Prepare for night driving – when driving at night, the first rule is to wear an up-to-date pair of distance glasses or contact lenses recommended by an optometrist. Avoid wearing tinted lenses, such as red or amber, as they can filter out traffic lights, brake lights and indicators of cars in front. Make sure headlights, brake lights and indicators are all working, and don't forget to keep the windscreen clean and clear, inside and out.

4 Avoid distractions – it is helpful to avoid distractions, especially when negotiating busy junctions. It is illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving. Even using hands-free can distract attention away from the road ahead and traffic conditions.

5 Plan your route – this is particularly important when driving on unfamiliar roads. However, even when driving close to home, take extra care at busy roundabouts, when turning right or when joining moving traffic from a slip road. When driving longer distances to unfamiliar places, a SatNav can be useful, but never adjust it while driving.

6 Keep active – daily physical activity like walking, cycling or swimming helps keep joints supple and will improve strength and flexibility. This can help address common problems such as turning the steering wheel or looking over your shoulder. Regular exercise can also help to sharpen mental agility and concentration.

7 Drive with care – reflexes can slow down as you get older and you may not notice it. Allow more time and space to react when driving by reducing your speed and leaving plenty of room between you and the car in front.

8 Refresh driving skills – driving on today's roads can be challenging. A refresher course designed to enhance your skills and knowledge of the law could be useful. Refresher courses and older driver assessments are now available through most driving schools as well as national organisations such as IAM Roadsmart and Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).

9 Make mobility modifications – if you are experiencing problems such as difficulty in gripping the steering wheel or with other car controls, the Scottish Driving Assessment Service can give advice. They can also provide a full fitness to drive assessment. This is a free NHS service which is open to everyone in Scotland via a referral from the GP. For more information visit www.smart.scot.nhs.uk/service/driving-assessment

Parking concessions may also be available to disabled drivers and passengers under the Blue Badge scheme. For further information visit www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

10 Be ready for winter driving – be sure to plan ahead if travelling in winter conditions. Ensure you have a fully charged mobile phone and keep up-to-date with the latest weather reports. Plan for any journey at www.traffic.gov.scot

Some people are eligible for help towards the cost of paying for their glasses or contact lenses, following a free NHS eye examination undertaken by a community optometry practice (opticians). This is provided in the form of an NHS optical voucher. Further information can be found at www.eyes.scot

Health, medicines and mobility

Certain prescribed or over-the-counter medicines can affect the ability to drive.

Everyday remedies such as cough medicines, cold and flu treatments, painkillers, antihistamines and even certain eyedrops can cause drowsiness behind the wheel.

The combined effects of taking more than one medication can also seriously affect your driving, even though one may be harmless on its own.

It is best to ask your pharmacist or doctor to check what medications are safe to take while driving. If not safe, then ask if they can recommend a safer alternative.

It is important to consider the effect on driving ability, such as withdrawal symptoms when you stop or reduce taking any medication.

Driving while impaired due to the use of prescription drugs is against the law and subject to exactly the same penalties as driving under the influence of illegal drugs. This can include a fine of up to £5,000, loss of licence and potentially prison.

The law

You must tell the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if you have a driving licence and:

- **you develop a 'notifiable' medical condition or disability**
- **a condition or disability has gotten worse since you got your licence**

Notifiable conditions are anything that could affect your ability to drive safely. They can include:

- **diabetes or taking insulin**
- **syncope (fainting)**
- **heart conditions**
- **sleep apnoea**
- **epilepsy**
- **strokes**
- **glaucoma**

You could be fined up to £1,000 if you do not tell the DVLA about a condition that might affect your ability to drive safely. You could also be prosecuted in the event of a collision, even if it is not your fault.

The rules and advice on what you must do will depend on the exact nature of your condition. It is essential to seek and follow advice from a medical professional, and to comply with any decision the DVLA makes about your driving licence. For further information visit www.olderdrivers.org.uk/the-law/common-conditions

Choosing when to stop

UK driving licences expire when you reach 70, but this doesn't mean the end of your driving career. It simply means you must renew your licence every three years. It is up to you to self-declare your fitness to drive. This is a good time to get your eyes examined and really assess your driving. It is an offence if you do not inform DVLA of any condition which might affect your driving.

Planning ahead for the day when you need to stop driving may make things less stressful in the long run.

If your reactions are becoming slower and you feel anxious when driving, it may be time to talk to someone about stopping.

Saving on running and repair costs, and the extra income from selling a car can be a real bonus. Calculate possible savings at: www.olderdrivers.org.uk/retire-from-driving

Getting out and about on foot or cycling can be invigorating, improve mental health and reduce stress. This is when a National Entitlement Card, more commonly known as a bus pass, comes in handy with the added bonus of contributing towards a cleaner, greener Scotland.

The law – when to stop driving

You must stop driving if your eyesight deteriorates below the minimum legal requirement. This means being able to read a standard size numberplate from a minimum distance of 20 metres.



This leaflet is available to download
in a variety of languages and accessible
formats at **roadsafety.scot**

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