

“Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.”

Alan Lakejin  
Author

# Navigating the Road to Becoming a Mature Driver

It's day four of Drive Safely Work Week and today's focus is on planning ahead to stay safe on the road as we age. But even the youngest drivers will find this information useful to help keep their skills sharp for years to come. With age comes experience and many mature drivers are among the safest out there. It's vital, however, to be aware that our physical and cognitive abilities change as we age and we need to plan accordingly.

## YOUR BODY

In addition to helping us feel and look better, staying in shape can also help avoid being injured (or worse) in a traffic crash.

- **Exercise boosts energy and improves overall mental and physical health.** Strength exercises such as weight training will preserve your ability to steer sharply and firmly press the brake pedal. Stretching exercises will improve your ability to turn to check blind spots and will assist in getting in and out of the vehicle with ease.
- **Eating right can help you perform at your best.** Fuel your body with foods that help prevent peaks and dips in blood sugar to avoid the “crashes” that can occur otherwise.

**YOUR PLAN:** Make time to stretch and exercise regularly and keep healthy snacks in your vehicle and at your desk to stay fueled up.

## PREMIUM FUEL

Pack these smart snacks to satisfy hunger and help maintain alertness:

- Raisins and nuts
- Apples—dried or fresh
- Sunflower seeds or granola

## YOUR EYES

90% of a driver's reaction depends on vision.<sup>1</sup> Most people experience reduced vision or other changes in eyesight as they age, often beginning in the 30s or 40s. To help see clearly:



- **Start with your vehicle and make sure windows, mirrors and headlights are clean.** Adjust rear- and side-view mirrors to minimize blind spots.
- **Get regular eye exams and wear your glasses while driving, if recommended by your doctor.** The American Optometric Association recommends a comprehensive exam take place every two years for people age 18–60 without risk factors, and annually after the age of 61 or if you have a personal or family history of eye disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, use of certain medications or you wear contact lenses. Always follow the recommendation of your eye doctor.
- **Keep sunglasses in the car.** Brown and bronze lenses are best at enhancing contrast and depth perception. Polarized glasses are also excellent for driving. If you wear glasses, consider getting prescription sunglasses or sunglasses that fit over your prescription frames.

**YOUR PLAN:** Wipe down the mirrors and windows, see the eye doctor and grab some sunglasses.

## SEE TROUBLE COMING

- Having issues reading signs or recognizing neighbors across the street?
- Is it difficult to see lane lines, medians, curbs and pedestrians, especially in the early mornings or evenings?
- Is the glare from headlights uncomfortable at night?

If you answered yes to any of these, make a plan to see an eye-care professional right away.



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## IT'S TIME TO CHANGE THE WAY WE VIEW SLEEP

A 2014 study by the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine concluded that extended sleep deprivation can lead to permanent loss of cells involved in functions like alertness, attention and recall. If you deprive your brain of adequate rest long or often enough, it may never fully bounce back. Wake up to the fact that regardless of age, sleep is not a luxury—it's a necessity!



## YOUR BRAIN

The brain is mission control for everything we do and is at the center of safe driving. Like any part of our body, it performs best when we take care of it.

- **Get plenty of rest.** 7–9 hours per night is recommended for most adults. Fatigued drivers have slower reaction times, altered judgment and compromised ability to process information.
- **Exercise your mind.** Most anyone—regardless of age—can strengthen their brains and improve mental sharpness. Regular use of brain-training games, ranging from a crossword puzzle or Sudoku to various smart phone apps, can make a big difference. One study found that people who had cognitive training for reasoning or speed of processing had 50% fewer at-fault traffic crashes.<sup>2</sup>

**YOUR PLAN:** Get 7-9 hours of sleep consistently and do regular cognitive exercises to keep your mind sharp.



## YOUR MEDICATIONS

We covered medications and driving on day three, but it bears repeating. Whether you take an over-the-counter (OTC) allergy medication or are on a combination of prescription medications, being a safe driver means you are aware of potential side effects that can influence driving. Read the labels of medications you take. If you take multiple prescriptions and/or supplements, be aware of potential drug interactions that can occur.

Consult your doctor or pharmacist about side effects and risks of medications. Never combine medications and alcohol when you plan to drive.

**YOUR PLAN:** Read the labels of all your medications and check on potential interactions and effects on driving.



According to the Food and Drug Administration, the following medications can impair driving:

- prescription drugs for anxiety
- some antidepressants
- products containing codeine
- some cold remedies and allergy products
- tranquilizers
- sleeping pills
- pain relievers
- diet pills, “stay awake” drugs, and other medications with stimulants (e.g. caffeine, ephedrine, pseudoephedrine)

<sup>2</sup> Ball, Karlene, PhD et al: Cognitive Training Decreases Motor Vehicle Collision Involvement Among Older Drivers, 2011 Journal of the American Geriatric Society, 2010; 58: 2107–2113.  
<sup>3</sup> Zhang, J. et al: Extended wakefulness: compromised metabolics in and degeneration of locus ceruleus neurons Journal of Neuroscience 34(12): 4418–4431, March 2014