

RISK FACTORS: Falls and Motor Vehicle Crashes

DID YOU KNOW that many of the factors that make a person more likely to fall, also make it more likely that they'll be involved in a crash?

These include:

- Impaired vision
 - Cataracts
 - Macular Degeneration
 - Glaucoma
 - Outdated glasses prescription
- Impaired balance
- Poor strength
- Frailty
- Impaired cognition
- Medications, especially:
 - Sleep aids
 - Pain medications
 - Anti-anxiety medications
 - Combinations of medications
- Chronic disease
 - Stroke
 - Diabetes
 - Heart Disease
 - Sleep disorders
- Previous falls or crashes
- Hot weather (dehydration)
- Alcohol and/or drugs



Older drivers with a history of falling are

40% more likely to be involved in a crash than their peers.



12 million older adults will experience a fall this year and over **400,000** will be involved in a crash.

Reasons older adults might experience a fall:

- Lower body weakness
- Taking certain medications
- Poor balance
- Vision problems
- Slow reaction time



Low impact fitness training programs and driving improvement courses can help:

- Enhance balance
- Promote flexibility
- Strengthen muscles
- Keep older drivers safe and on the road longer

www.AAA.com/Fitness
Helping Seniors Drive Safer & Longer



References: NHTSA General Estimates System (GES) data, analyzed by AAA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Unintentional injury is the 7th leading cause of death for people 65 and older in the US (55,951 deaths in 2017). Of the various types of unintentional injuries that cause death, **Falls are #1** (31,190 deaths) and **motor vehicle crashes are #2** at (7,667 deaths).

Falls are the #1 cause of nonfatal injury for people 65 and older (2,970,720 injuries in 2017); **motor vehicle crashes are the #4 cause** (215,666 injuries in 2017).

(Source: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>)

IF YOU'RE CONCERNED about a loved one's risk of falling, you should also consider whether they're at risk for a crash. Ask your medical professional for advice.

SCREENING AND PREVENTION: Falls and Motor Vehicle Crashes

HOW DO YOU KNOW if you or a loved one might be at greater risk of a crash?

There are several tools available to you:

- **Vision Exam, Medication Review, and Annual Check-ups:** To decrease your risk of both falls and crashes, don't neglect regular eye exams and physical exams to catch any changes in your health that might affect your driving or walking ability. Be sure that your doctor or pharmacist regularly reviews ALL medications you're taking (including supplements and over-the-counter medications). You can also use Roadwise Rx, a free online tool, to check your medications for possible side effects and interactions. (roadwiserx.com)
- **Screening Tools:** these can be do-it-yourself, administered by a family member or friend, or performed by a health professional like your family doctor or an occupational therapist. Many are free; those that are not free may be covered by insurance.
 - AARP Fitness-to-Drive screening tool: www.aarp.org/auto/driver-safety/info-2013/fitness-to-drive-screening-tool.html
 - CDC's Stay Independent brochure (includes fall risk self-assessment): <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/pdf/STEADI-Brochure-StayIndependent-508.pdf>
- **On-Road Testing:** If screening indicates a problem, the next step may be on-road testing. More detailed and more expensive, and typically not covered by insurance, on-road tests may be performed by a Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialist or by a specially trained driving instructor. On-road tests can give detailed information about specific problems that may make someone unsafe to drive. They can also suggest modifications (such as not driving at night or in unfamiliar areas) or interventions (exercises or training) that can help someone stay safe longer. Your doctor or occupational therapist can refer you for on-road testing; more information is available at <https://seniordriving.aaa.com/evaluate-your-driving-ability/professional-assessment/>
- **In-Person Vehicle Check and Adjustment:** CarFit lets a trained specialist work with you in your own car to check for safety issues and adjust your seats, mirror, seat belts and other features to make your drive safer. <https://www.car-fit.org/>

RESOURCES: Falls and Motor Vehicle Crashes

WHAT NEXT? If you have concerns about driving safety or fall risk for yourself or a loved one, here are some useful resources.

Useful Professionals:

- **Primary Care Doctor:** The best starting place for information on medical conditions, medication and conditions that may affect your ability to drive or your risk of falling.
- **Occupational Therapist:** OTs specialize in daily activities like cooking, shopping, paying bills, and driving. They can assess your driving safety and can help you be a safer driver; they can also help you move around safely in your home or neighborhood.
- **Physical Therapist:** PTs are exercise specialists. If you have limited strength, limited range of motion, balance problems, or other problems that hinder your driving or walking, a PT can help with exercises and stretches to improve your ability to get around safely.

Useful Organizations:

- **Area Agency on Aging:** find your local agency at www.n4a.org
- **Veteran's Administration:** the VA has resources on safer driving and walking for veterans, including older veterans. https://www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Safe_Driving_Tips_for_Veterans.asp
- **Georgia Department of Driver Services' senior drivers page:** dds.georgia.gov/senior-drivers

Classes, Training and Events:

- **CarFit:** improve the fit of your own vehicle. Learn more or find an event at www.car-fit.org
- **AARP's SmartDriver™** course may earn you a discount on car insurance: <https://www.aarp.org/auto/driver-safety/>
- Many forms of exercise such as yoga, tai chi, dance, and water aerobics can decrease your risk of falling and also make you a stronger, more alert driver. Some classes for older adults are covered by insurance. Ask your insurance provider!
- Online exercise routine from AARP: www.aarp.org/auto/driver-safety/info-2013/exercise-for-safety.html

New Vehicle Technology:

- Mycardoeswhat.org explains new vehicle safety technologies and what they can do to make you a safer driver. Learn which features are best for you and which may be annoying or confusing.
- Renting or buying a new car? Take the time to have the dealer or renter walk you through the car's advanced safety features. Many buyers and renters don't bother, so they miss out on the benefits (and don't learn how to adjust or turn off features that may be distracting or annoying!).