

# The Older and Wiser Driver



*With aging, changes occur in hearing, vision, flexibility and reaction time.  
Are you at risk?*

***Rate your own driving practices:  
Get started now... Just click here!***



***Interested in a Driving Refresher Course?***  
*Click here to obtain information on the next scheduled  
half-day course*  
**The Mature Driver Workshop at**  
[http://safetyservicesmanitoba.ca/mpi\\_partnership.aspx](http://safetyservicesmanitoba.ca/mpi_partnership.aspx)  
*offered by Safety Services Manitoba*

## Acknowledgements

In this International Year of Older Persons, the Older Driver Booklet represents a collaborative effort on the part of organizations who celebrate the efforts of seniors and their continuing importance in our communities.

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## **Aging is inevitable - It happens to everybody**

But growing older doesn't have to mean giving up an active life. While aging does impose physical limitations, many people achieved their greatest success when they were over 60. Almost everyone concerned with traffic safety wants to keep older drivers on the highways as long as they can drive safely. Age should never be mistaken as the sole indicator of driving ability. In fact, in Manitoba, drivers over 55 represent a wide range of abilities, and no individual will lose his or her licence solely because of age.

However, the skills needed for safe driving - vision, reflexes, flexibility, hearing - begin to deteriorate around age 55 with an even greater loss after 75. Aging drivers can adjust their driving habits to cope safely with this decline, but to do this they must recognize their limitations and unsafe driving practices and be aware of actions they can take to make their driving safer. Creating this awareness is the purpose of this booklet.

The rating form on the next page is for your use alone. Answer the questions as honestly as possible. Use the rating guide to compute your score and learn where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Then, read the Suggestions for Improvement section that corresponds to each question to see how to improve your driving.

The central idea is to help you drive safely as long as possible.



# Self Rating Form

<b>Instructions:</b> For each of the following 15 questions check the symbol (    ) of the one answer that applies to you.	Always or almost always	Some-Times	Never or Almost Never
1. I signal and check to the rear when I change lanes.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. I wear a seat belt.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. I try to stay informed on changes in driving and highway regulations.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Intersections bother me because there is so much to watch from all directions.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
5. I find it difficult to decide when to join traffic on a busy highway.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
6. I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
7. When I am really upset, I show it in my driving.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
8. My thoughts wander when I am driving.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Traffic situations make me angry.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
10. I get regular eye checks to keep my vision at its sharpest.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
11. I check with my doctor or pharmacist about the effect of my medications on driving ability. (If you do not take any medication, skip this question)	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
12. I try to stay abreast of current information on health practices and habits.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
13. My children, other family members or friends are concerned about my driving ability.	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
	None	One or Two	Three or More
14. How many traffic tickets, warnings, or "discussions" with officers have you had in the past two years?	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>
15. How many accidents have you had during the past two years?	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>	 <input type="checkbox"/>

## Self Scoring

Count the number of checkmarks in the squares, triangles and circles and record the totals below:

Total:     
 These are your Check Mark Totals.

<b>Scoring:</b> There are 5 steps.		
<b>Step 1:</b>	Write the Check Mark Total recorded in the square above.	
<b>Step 2:</b>	Write the Check Mark Total recorded in the triangle above.	
<b>Step 3:</b>	Multiply the number in the square by 5.  X 5 =	
<b>Step 4:</b>	Multiply the number in the triangle by 3.  X 3 =	
<b>Step 5:</b>	Add the results of Steps 3 and 4.	
<b>Your score is</b>		

No matter what your score, look at the [Suggestions for Improvement](#) section for each area in which you checked a square or triangle. These are the areas in which you can improve the most.

Score	Meaning
<b>0 to 15</b>	<b>GO!</b> You are aware of what is important to safe driving and are practicing what you know. See the Suggestions for Improvement in the following section of this booklet, to learn how to become an even safer driver.
<b>16 to 34</b>	<b>CAUTION!</b> You are engaging in some practices that need improvement to ensure safety. Look to the <a href="#">Suggestions for Improvement</a> section to see how you might improve driving.
<b>35 and over</b>	<b>STOP!</b> You are engaging in too many unsafe driving practices. You are a potential or actual hazard to yourself and others. Examine the areas where you checked squares or triangles. Read the <a href="#">Suggestions for Improvement</a> section for ways to correct these problem areas.

Your score is based on your answers to a limited number of important questions. For a complete evaluation of your driving ability, many more questions would be required, along with medical, physical, and licencing examinations. Nevertheless, your answers and score give some indication of how well you are doing and how you can become a safer driver.

In general, a checked square for an item reflects an unsafe practice or situation that should be changed immediately. A checked triangle means a practice or situation that is unsafe, or on its way to becoming unsafe, if nothing is done to improve it. Checking circles is a sign that you are doing what you should be doing to be (and remain) a safe driver.

Most of the square and triangle answers represent practices or situations that can be improved by most drivers. The following pages contain Suggestions for Improvement, divided into each of the 15 areas. You should review all of them but you will want to focus on those for which you checked squares or triangles.

## Suggestions for Improvement

Think about what tasks you do every time you get behind the wheel of a car. You must coordinate the actions of your hands, feet, eyes, ears, and body movements. At the same time, you must decide how to react to what you see, hear, and feel in relation to other cars and drivers, traffic signs and signals, conditions of the highway, and the performance of your car.

These decisions are usually made close to other vehicles and must be converted quickly into action - brake, steer, accelerate, or a combination of all - to maintain or adjust your position in traffic. And these decisions must be made frequently. About 20 major decisions are needed for each kilometre driven; drivers frequently have less than one-half second to act to avoid a collision.

The record of older drivers is good, when you consider the number of collisions per driver, but when you consider the number of collisions per kilometre driven, this record is surprisingly bad. Older drivers have fewer collisions, because they drive less and at less dangerous times. But when they are in a collision, it can be very serious because injuries that are seen as moderate to severe for most people are fatal to people aged 55 and older.

One of the purposes of this self-rating form is to help you become, if you are not already, an "activated driver". An activated driver is someone who assumes responsibility for his or her own driving skills and who self-examines and compares his or her ability with the requirements for safe driving. Through knowledge and self-awareness, you will understand what a safe driver is and will assume the responsibility to be a safe driver. On the other hand, you may decide that your driving poses a risk and decide to give up your driver's licence and seek other forms of transportation.

The questionnaire you have just completed has helped you to locate those areas where your physical and decision making abilities call for a change in your driving habits and skills. This section of the booklet offers suggestions to improve each driving skill highlighted in the questionnaire. Be sure to focus on those sections that correspond to the problem areas identified by the questionnaire.

## 1. I signal and check to the rear when I change lanes.

Even if you checked "Never," you probably know that "Always" is the only acceptable answer.

Checking rearview and side mirrors, looking to the rear to cover the blind spots, and signaling well before you move are the only ways to avoid hitting a car when changing lanes.

But why don't you do these things all the time? In some cases, you might simply forget. In observational studies, older drivers report being unaware of having failed to look to the rear before changing lanes or backing up. Many of our driving habits are exactly that - habits! And we stop being aware of our actions especially if we have driven accident free for a long time.

Many older drivers stop looking over their shoulders because they've lost flexibility. If you have arthritis, then you know how painful a quick look over the shoulder can be.

If looking over your shoulder to check for traffic is difficult you'll want to:

- Install extra-wide rearview mirrors and side mirrors to decrease your blind spots. You'll need to learn how to use the side mirrors correctly, because those of convex lens design can make objects appear smaller and farther away than they actually are.
- Ask your doctor about medications and exercises that might improve your flexibility.
- Take a re-training or refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the effects on driving due to aging. Call Creative Retirement Manitoba or the Manitoba Safety Council for information about courses. Numbers are listed at the back of this booklet.
- Make a concerted effort to be aware of your driving habits and decide to always look before changing lanes.
- If you drive with another person who provides information to assist you, make sure that information is correct.



## 2. I wear a seat belt.

The only acceptable answer is "Always".

In Manitoba, wearing seat belts is the law. For people over 55, there is an added incentive for wearing seat belts: half of all traffic fatalities could have been lessened to injuries if the people had been wearing seat belts. People over 65 are more likely than younger persons to be injured or killed when involved in a collision.

Even if you are going to drive only a short distance under ideal conditions, you must wear your seat belt. Typical collisions involving older drivers occur on clear days, on straight, dry pavement, and at intersections within 25 kilometres of the driver's home. To be effective, seatbelts should be worn properly.

The negative tales you may have heard about seat belts, such as being trapped in a car that catches fire, are either myths or extraordinarily rare events. Properly fastened seat belts are unquestionably the best way to reduce injuries and fatalities following an accident.

You can increase your chances of surviving a collision or reducing injury by taking the following steps:

- Accept the clearly demonstrated value of seat belts in saving lives and reducing injuries. Convince those who travel with you of this value. Then make sure that you and all who ride in your car wear them.
- Wear your seat belt properly at all times, even if your car is equipped with air bags. Shoulder belts should fit across your shoulder and upper thigh bones. Serious injury can occur if improperly worn.
- If your seat belt is extremely uncomfortable or cannot be properly fastened, take it to a competent mechanic for alterations. Many cars have adjustable shoulder belt mounts or you can buy devices that improve the fit.
- If your car does not have an automatic reminder to fasten seat belts, leave yourself a note on the dashboard or sun visor. Remind your passengers to buckle up. Assist them with their belts if necessary.

### 3. I try to stay informed of changes in driving and highway regulations.

The best answer is "Always," but "Sometimes" is certainly better than "Never."

Drivers of any age can be a menace if they do not know and follow "the rules of the road," no matter how good a driver they have been in the past. New traffic laws and devices include right-turn-on-red laws, directional signals regulating lane use, and shared left-turn lane markings.

Knowing the signs and symbols can help you, especially if your ability to see these devices is diminishing. Sometimes, just recognizing what the shapes of signs mean can help you anticipate their message. Familiarity and knowing what to do reduces hesitation and uncertainty when you need to make a decision fast.

Here's how you can learn more about them:

- Obtain a current Driver's Handbook from a Division of Driver and Vehicle Licencing office or in rural locations from a Driver Licencing Agency. Study the handbook as though you were taking the test.
- Take a "brush-up" lesson with a professional driving school or refresher course with Creative Retirement Manitoba.
- Make a point of reading articles in your local newspapers for changes in traffic patterns and special intersections or signage, so you feel prepared and confident. Magazines such as CAA Manitoba's Going Places publish driving tips that can help you stay current.

#### **4. Intersections bother me: There is too much to watch for from all directions.**

Ideally, you might like to answer "Never," but if you checked "Sometimes" or "Always," you are not alone.

Everyone has problems with intersections. You must interact with other drivers and pedestrians whose movements and decisions are difficult to anticipate.

Intersections are one of the more common sites of collisions involving older drivers, especially left-turn situations.

How comfortable you feel around intersections can be an early warning sign that you need a refresher course or other assistance. Listen to your instincts and take a good look at your driving skills. What bothers you most about intersections? Is it an inability to handle all the information quickly enough? Are you unsure about how to position the car for a left or right turn? Do you find it difficult to turn the steering wheel because of arthritis or some other physical problem? Sometimes, this sort of analysis can lead you to solutions.

If you find intersections difficult, see the following steps for improvement:

- If one or two intersections on your regular routes give you particular trouble, study them while on foot. Watch the problems other drivers have to handle. Notice how the signals assist drivers and pedestrians. This way you know in advance what the common problems are and how to handle them when they occur. This kind of analysis can help you handle other intersections as well.
- Plan your trips to avoid busy intersections or use them at less congested times. Plan an alternate route to avoid left turns from busy intersections. You can sometimes make three right turns to avoid having to make a left turn. If you must turn left, pay extra attention to the speed of the cars coming toward you.
- Take a re-training or refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the limitations of age. What you learn may give you the confidence to recognize that you can handle intersections correctly.

## 5. I find it difficult to decide when to join traffic on a busy highway.

Most of us would like to answer "Never," but if you checked "Sometimes" or "Always," you are not alone.

Almost all drivers have some feelings of insecurity and nervousness about entering a busy highway or any high-speed road. If you dislike the speed of traffic and the number of cars on highways or have stopped using them entirely, you may want to improve your skills so you can use them more confidently.

If you travel regularly on the highway, you probably have gained experience and feel confident about driving on them. However, if you drive them infrequently or not at all, you are probably concerned about what you "don't know" about them. Even if you have experience driving on busy highways, there can be times when there are more cars, faster traffic and more congestion than you have had to deal with before. Unless you remain aware of when such peak-use time can be expected, and have made plans that take those peak times into account, highway driving can be intimidating.

Here are some suggestions for improving your skills on highways:

- If you decide that you do not know enough about highways to drive on them safely and that reluctance to enter them may in part be a fear of the unknown, take a refresher course to learn how to use highways properly.
- If you feel you have the ability to drive on highways, but want to improve your skills, arrange driving lessons with a driving school. Then, practice when traffic is less congested.
- If you feel so uncomfortable on highways that you feel you may be in danger, try to avoid them, look for a parallel route.

## 6. I think I am slower than I used to be in reacting to dangerous driving situations.

"Never" is the only fully satisfactory answer here, although you may have answered "Sometimes" and still be considered a careful driver.

Emergencies and dangerous situations may be relatively uncommon, but fast and safe reaction to them is essential. Most older drivers tend to have good judgment when driving. It is in reacting to emergencies that some older drivers most markedly demonstrate a slowing down.

Older drivers have trouble taking in information from several sources at once, and therefore respond more slowly to dangerous situations.

The physical and psychological changes of aging begin in middle age, and some of these changes can increase driving risk.

To respond quickly to a traffic situation requires that several skills be sharp: First, you must see or hear the danger. Second, you have to recognize that the situation is dangerous and requires action. Third, you must decide how to act. And fourth, you must act appropriately. A slight slowing down in each of these skills can result in a much slower overall response time to traffic emergencies.

Driving is also a physical activity, and a driver who is not physically fit may not have the strength, flexibility and co-ordination to operate a vehicle safely. Keeping physically fit can help make you a safer driver!

What can you do to maintain or improve your emergency situation driving skills?

- Have regular medical check-ups.
- Your doctor may refer you to an occupational therapist and have your physical and mental driving skills evaluated. In many cases, practice exercises can improve your skills.
- Take a re-training or refresher course that helps older drivers adjust to the limitations of age. There, you can learn and practice ways to improve your ability to more rapidly anticipate and avoid dangerous situations. Avoid driving in congested, fast-moving traffic, whenever possible. Keep yourself physically fit and mentally stimulated.

- Do not drive if you have been drinking, are tired, ill, or have taken any drug that slows your mental or physical responses.
- Under supervision, exercise to maintain or increase the flexibility of your joints and your muscular strength. Gardening, golf, tennis and other sports can keep you in good physical shape.
- If your joint and muscle impairments are serious, ask your doctor about medical, physical and surgical therapies. Anti-inflammatory drugs and various surgical procedures can lessen impairment sufficiently to permit safe driving.
- Equip your car with devices that compensate for losses of flexibility and strength and learn how to use them. Make sure your next car has power steering, power brakes, automatic seat adjustment, and other features to help you control your car better.

## **7. When I am really upset, I show it in my driving.**

The only acceptable answer is "Never."

A brief display of emotions or a moment of inattention can produce a collision. Anger especially must be kept out of the car.

Experience and good judgement may make you a better driver. However, if you were aggressive and hostile on the road when young, you are likely to be much the same today. The difference is that now, because of decreased driving skills, you may not have the ability to recover from those dangerous highway situations that arise out of aggression and hostility.

Take the following steps to minimize anger behind the wheel:

- When you are very emotional about something, don't drive until you have calmed down.
- Awareness is the first step toward controlling anger. The second step is handling it in a healthy manner, such as taking a vigorous walk several times around the block or more if necessary, or talking with a friend or a professional counselor. Getting behind the wheel in a highly emotional state, whether joy or anger, diverts attention from the driving task and invites trouble.

## 8. My thoughts wander when I am driving.

The ideal answer is "Never," but even the best drivers catch themselves at this "Sometimes." However, if you checked "Always," you are a dangerous driver.

Driving is a complicated and demanding task, requiring continuous concentration. Even momentary lapses can lead to danger.

Investigations of collisions and fatalities of older drivers, particularly those over age 65, show that inattention and failing to take action are underlying causes, or at least contributing factors.

Not seeing road signs or stop signs, failing to yield, and so on, are major problems of older drivers cited for violations or involved in collisions. These problems are thought to be due to inattention.

Of course you have probably seen drivers in animated conversations or talking on car phones and noticed how it affected their driving - slamming on brakes or drifting from their lanes. Other drivers drink coffee, groom themselves, or try to glance at reading materials while driving. In an emergency, these inattentive drivers may not be able to return from their diversions in time to take evasive action.

Many conditions that you may not be able to control can interfere with your ability to concentrate: emotional upsets, fatigue, illness, medications, alcohol, full meals, pain, or a loud radio.

One area in which you have total control is your decision to give driving your full attention. Give driving the attention it deserves, and you will buy yourself valuable seconds of reaction time in an emergency.

To keep your thoughts from wandering, you can:

- Maintain proper speeds and try and stay with the flow of traffic. Remember, going too slowly can sometimes be as dangerous as going too fast.
- Treat driving as a complicated task requiring your full attention. Remember, 30 complex decisions are needed for every kilometre you drive.
- If you catch yourself daydreaming or otherwise failing to concentrate on your driving, identify what is diverting you and try to overcome it. If you have difficulty, seek help such as talking to your doctor.
- Take the necessary steps to remove or reduce distractions such as turning off the radio.
- Play the "What If" game to stay alert and mentally prepare for driving emergencies. Ask what you would do if certain situations occur.

## 9. Traffic situations make me angry.

The best answer is "Never," but those who have been stuck in traffic for long periods understand why "Sometimes" might be chosen. An answer of "Always" reveals that some changes are needed.

Anger behind the wheel comes out in dangerous ways. Most people trapped in slow-moving traffic feel frustrated, and this frustration can lead to anger at the situation. However, some people direct their anger at other people, instead of the traffic situation itself. This can lead to inappropriate reactions such as honking horns, yelling at other drivers, cutting others off in traffic, blocking intersections, or playing one-upsmanship games with other drivers.

When drivers become emotional, all out of proportion to the situation, it is a clear sign that other emotions are the true cause and driving has become an outlet for expressing anger. Many emotions can turn into anger. Fear of other drivers, who they feel are driving recklessly, can bring on violent anger. Anxiety over being late and anger at other situations in one's life can also provoke unwarranted anger. All these emotions are counter-productive.

The worst part of the anger is how drivers express it. If you find yourself driving erratically, driving too fast, or tailgating someone "to teach them a lesson," then you need to stop and ask yourself: "Is it worth it?" Anyone with a heart condition knows that reacting to every little annoyance and frustration with anger can be dangerous; we all need to understand that reacting to driving situations with aggressive driving can be just as fatal as a heart attack.

Fortunately, there are many ways to make driving less stressful and make your own responses less emotional:

- Accept the fact that anger will do nothing to get you out of irritating traffic situations. On the contrary, it may get you into collisions. Taking a few slow, deep breaths and forcing yourself to smile are excellent stress-relievers.
- Choose to be a responsible driver. Recognize when you are becoming angry. Then examine why anger seems to reach irrational proportions. Ask yourself "Why am I getting upset?" Then, try to take the necessary corrective steps. Keep cool.
- Try to avoid the kind of traffic you know is likely to generate anger. The smoother the traffic flow, the less the anger, and the fewer the accidents.
- If you think that you might be converting fear of traffic into anger, take steps to boost your skills and confidence, such as taking a re-training or refresher course.



## 10. I get regular eye checks to keep my vision at its sharpest.

The only acceptable answer is "Always."

Eighty-five to ninety-five percent of all sensing clues in driving come through the eyes. Poor visual capacity is directly related to poor driving. Reduced performance from faulty vision shows up in slowed response to signals, signs and traffic events in ways that can lead to a collision.

Doctors cannot correct all vision problems, but only doctors and optometrists can help you with those vision problems that are correctable, such as visual acuity (ability to focus) and disease-related vision loss. Seeing a doctor on a regular basis is the only way to be sure that your vision is the best it can be.

Aging does bring vision problems, but we all share these difficulties in a fairly predictable, natural way. No matter how well you have taken care of your eyes, these problems will develop.

Between the ages of 40 and 60, night vision becomes progressively worse. Pupils become smaller, the muscles less elastic, and the lenses become thicker and less clear. A 60-year-old driver must have 10 times the light required by a 20-year-old.

During this time, eyes become sensitive to glare, which also makes driving at night difficult. Eye lenses become thicker and yellowed with age, resulting in a fogging vision and sensitivity to glare. A 55-year-old takes eight times as long to recover from glare as a 16-year-old.

Visual changes accelerate at age 55. You begin to miss objects that are not moving, such as pedestrians waiting to enter a crosswalk.

Around age 70, your peripheral vision usually begins to deteriorate. Drivers receive 98% of their visual communication through peripheral vision.

Distinguishing between colors becomes more difficult. Red colors do not appear as bright to many older eyes, and it may take some senior drivers twice as long as it took in earlier years to detect the flash of brake lights.

Another visual ability that declines over the years is depth perception: how close or how far you are in relation to a car or object ahead. This capacity is especially critical when trying to judge how fast other cars are coming, which contributes to the problems you may have in making left turns.

Several medical conditions that tend to come with age can affect sight: cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetes. Regular visits to your doctor can help you head off their blinding effects.

There are several things you can do to handle the loss of vision that comes with aging:

- Take the corrective steps recommended by your doctor. If eyeglasses are prescribed, keep them up to date by letting the doctor know at once if they are not working well for you.
- Enroll in an older driver training course where you can learn specific techniques for coping with the limits imposed by aging eyes. You may also learn about how to use special devices, such as larger mirrors, that you can install.
- Accept the limits of "aging eyes," and reduce the amount of driving you do after dark and at twilight (one of the most dangerous times). The chances of having a collision are three times greater at night than in daytime.
- Avoid tinted windshields and always keep your windshield and headlights clean.
- Turn your head frequently to compensate for diminished peripheral vision.
- Keep your eyes up - look at the road ahead to see trouble before you reach it. In the city, look at least one block ahead; on the highway, look at the section of the road you'll reach in 20 seconds.

## 11. I check with my doctor or pharmacist about the effects of my medications on my driving ability.

- The only acceptable answer is "Always."
- While you might be wary of the effects of prescription drugs, even over-the-counter drugs can reduce driving ability.
- The drugs that slow you down generally also reduce your capacity to make decisions and process information rapidly. Tranquilizers or cold remedies, such as cold tablets, cough syrup, and sleeping pills, can reduce driving ability.
- Combinations of drugs present another danger, because they can bring on unexpected side effects and bad reactions. If you have more than one doctor prescribing medications without knowing what the others are prescribing, you could be in danger.
- Another drug, which you may not think of as a drug, with this same effect is alcohol. Alcohol has a powerful impact on our total system, physical and psychological. Alcohol is probably the single most important human factor in fatal collisions for drivers over 65.
- It is important to avoid alcoholic beverages when taking other medications. With few exceptions, combining alcohol and other drugs significantly multiplies the impairment of your driving skills. Even worse, they make a potent additive that in extreme cases can cause coma or death.
- The only safe practice is to avoid alcohol completely if there is any chance that you will have to drive. Tolerance for alcohol decreases steadily with age. Older people are also less efficient at ridding their systems of alcohol. Food, mood, fatigue, medication, general health, weight, and size of body can all make a difference in predicting overall effect.
- Remember the penalties of drinking and driving: heavy fines, jail sentences, and suspension of licence.
- Ensure that the combination of your medications do not impair your driving skills. Ask your doctor what the side effects of a prescribed medication might be and what, if anything, you can do to counter them, particularly as they apply to driving.
- If you have more than one doctor prescribing medications, make sure all of them know about all the drugs you are taking, both prescribed and over-the counter. Bring all your medicines with you when you go to the doctor. Read all labels and instructions on prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs to determine side effects and their relationship to whether you should drive. If a medication you're taking is labeled "Do not use while operating heavy machinery" let someone else drive.
- If any medication makes you feel sleepy or disoriented, don't drive.
- Remember that combinations of medicines can magnify their effects beyond the individual warnings. Ask your pharmacist to look for dangerous drug interactions.
- Convince yourself that the only safe action is not to drink alcoholic beverages at all if you intend to drive and to refuse to ride with anyone who has been drinking.

## 12. I try to stay abreast of current information on health practices and habits.

The preferred answer is "Always," but "Sometimes" is also understandable. However, if you checked "Never," then you may have given up on your personal health or think that you have no control over it.

You have far more control than you might think: What you eat, how much you exercise, and regular visits to the doctor (and following the doctor's advice) can help you keep driving longer and extend your life.

Individual life styles have a direct relationship to longevity and the quality of life. It all begins with your attitude about how much control you believe you have over the quality of your life. It ends with how much of it you are willing to exercise.

We all want to be able to handle the demands of safe driving. To keep your licence, you must remain alert and quick to respond in emergency situations. You also need to keep up to date about health habits that keep your mind and body in shape and able to handle the demands of safe driving.

True, this booklet has emphasized the reduction in driving skills that come with age. But even though research points to changes in the central nervous system as the culprits, you can reduce this slowing down with increased motivation to improve and stay in shape. Exercise reduces the extent of slowing, and extended exercise may eliminate it completely.

Learn to appreciate the close ties between personal health habits and driving skills. The same attitude that encourages you to remain informed on health practices will also help you to feel in control of your future as a driver.

You can stay informed by following these steps:

- Think realistically about how much control you have and want in terms of health habits as they relate to your life in general and to your driving. Learn more about the relationships between good health practices and how they can help you drive safely longer. Keep in mind that the slowness that comes with aging can be deterred or overcome by motivation, regular exercise, and practice.
- Take as much control as you can of your health habits and life style, recognizing the obvious connection between command of personal health and skill in driving.
- Understand the value of nutrition, exercise, medical check-ups, and the effects of medications, drugs, and alcohol. Your doctor can give you information about all of these areas and tell you where to get more information.
- If you feel you cannot change and are simply waiting for the inevitable aging and loss of skills, consider giving up your driver's licence. As difficult as that may be, it is better to stop driving than to be involved in a collision that can injure or kill you and others.

### **13. My children, other family members or friends are concerned about my driving ability.**

"Never" is the best answer here, but many older drivers have been aware of critical comments on their driving. If you have heard such comments, you may feel that the critics are worse drivers than you or are generally afraid in certain traffic situations, no matter who is driving.

It is difficult to accept criticism, but it can be a valuable source of information about your driving skills. If you chose "Always" or "Sometimes," then you can use this information as an opportunity to learn where your driving needs the most improvement.

Of all age groups, drivers over 50 have the most misconceptions of the actual risk of having a collision. These misconceptions grow with age. Furthermore, older drivers underestimate how much their own actions and problems contribute to accident risk.

Listen to criticism, so you can improve your driving skills and avoid collisions. Once you start having collisions, or traffic tickets, your licence can be suspended.

Here are some suggestions on how to listen to criticism and comments and turn them into a positive effect on your driving:

- Listen to the comments of those concerned about your driving, and keep an open mind. Be sure that you are not dismissing the value of these comments out of denial.
- Look at your responses to the other questions in this self evaluation. Be very honest with yourself so you can locate specific problem areas and correct them. Human beings are never too old to learn new skills.
- Begin to prepare for the day when driving will no longer be possible for you, so you can remain mobile after you stop driving. With adequate planning, a non-driving life does not have to be restrictive.

## 14. How many traffic tickets, warnings, or discussions with officers have you had in the past two years?

Of course "None" is the preferred answer here for it would be a sign that you are doing everything you should be doing to remain a safe driver (or at least have been alert enough not to have been caught doing the things you should not be doing). "One or two" incidents in the last two years might mean that you are not as current as you should be on the laws and rules of the road.

"Three or more" incidents in the last two years demands a serious look at how you are driving.

If you have been stopped many times, then you must be driving dangerously a good part of the time. If little can realistically be done to reduce that danger, you should make alternate plans for transportation.

Some older drivers are aware of their limits and cope with them. Others, however, overestimate their real capabilities and do not adjust their driving habits. The most cited problems of older drivers include failure to yield, failure to observe signs and signals, careless crossing of intersections, changing lanes without due regard for others, improper backing, and driving too slowly. Inattention and having too much information to handle at one time seem to be the root of most of these conditions.

There are several positive steps you can take if you have received traffic tickets or warnings:

- Examine why you got the ticket or warning to determine the true cause. Did you miss a stop sign because you were inattentive or because you simply did not see it? Then act on that information. This booklet contains several specific recommendations for particular problems. Review this book and use the Suggestions for Improvement to improve your driving skills.
- Use the ticket or citation as a warning sign. Act quickly, since citations relate directly to collisions.
- Enroll in an older driver training course where you can brush up on your driving skills and learn new ways to handle the challenges faced by older drivers.

## Additional Driving Tips

### Handling Diverse Driving Conditions

#### Rural Roads

While rural roads often have less traffic than city streets or highways, they can pose special challenges for any driver.

Here are just a few potentially dangerous situations to watch out for:

- "Instant intersections" - as you drive, scan both sides of the road, watching for hidden driveways, farm field accesses etc., which can become "instant intersections".
- Watch for slow moving vehicles, like farm or construction equipment.
- Avoid passing whenever possible. If you must pass a slow moving vehicle, ensure that there are no oncoming vehicles and give the vehicles behind you plenty of notice of your intention by signaling early.

#### City Driving

City driving can be frustrating, even nerve-racking, but if you observe the traffic rules, signs and signals and keep the following tips in mind, it can be much easier.

- Plan your route ahead of time.
- Make sure that you are in the correct lane. For example, if you know you will need to make a right turn in three or four blocks, try to get in and stay in the right-hand lane well in advance of your turn.
- Be alert for construction and resulting detours.
- Watch for pedestrians.
- Be alert and obey traffic signals.
- Scan the traffic conditions for about one block ahead.
- Be alert for potential traffic problems.
- Watch for brake lights.
- Avoid left turns whenever possible.
- Stop far enough back at lights to be able to maneuver out of dangerous or emergency situations.

## Parking Lots

Pull straight through to a parking spot and park with the nose of the car facing out whenever possible, to avoid backing out.

Drive in proper lanes only, never drive across parking spaces.

Be alert for vehicles which may suddenly back out of parking spaces. At night, always try to park in well-lit areas.

When you return to your vehicle, have your keys ready in your hand.

Approach the car from the rear so that you can see the entire car and notice if anyone is hiding or lurking nearby. As you approach, look under the vehicle too. Always check inside the vehicle before getting in.

If you see anything suspicious, go back and get help!

## Highway Driving

Highway driving is often the most intimidating form of driving for the mature driver. High speeds and multiple lanes, exit and entrance ramps can seem daunting. But keeping these guidelines in mind will make highways look a little friendlier:

- Always plan your route carefully. Make sure you know the names and locations of all of the roads and exits that you will need to take.
- Obey posted speed limits. Remember that you must maintain at least the minimum posted speed.
- Try to maintain a steady speed.
- Avoid unnecessary lane changes, stay in the right-hand lane especially if you are moving slower than the rest of the traffic. Do not use the left, or "fast" lane unless you are passing another vehicle.
- If you are uncomfortable driving at high speeds, try to avoid the highway whenever possible.
- Do not follow too closely behind the vehicle in front of you.
- Observe directional and warning signs.
- Never back up on the highway.

Drowsiness can be a real danger with highway driving. To avoid drowsiness, keep your eyes moving, scanning the road ahead. Move your head often. Open the window to get fresh air. Take frequent rest stops; get out of the car and stretch or walk around. If you find yourself becoming too sleepy to drive, pull off the road and find a motel.



## **Inclement Driving Conditions Driving in Ice and Snow**

The first rule of driving in ice and snow is: Don't! However, if you absolutely must drive in this weather condition:

- Make absolutely certain your vehicle is road worthy before you drive; check windshield wipers and window defrosters, clear all windows and headlights and brake lights of ice and snow, check tire tread. Get a good set of snow tires.
- Maintain a safe speed. You will have to drive more slowly than usual.
- Maintain a greater distance from the car in front of you, so that you'll have plenty of stopping time.
- Remember that bridges, overpasses and exit ramps may be hazardous and iced over even when other roads are in good condition.
- Do not use cruise control on icy or snow-packed roads.

## **If you Start to Skid**

- Don't panic, stay calm. Calm, smooth movements can help you avoid a collision.
- Take your foot off of the accelerator pedal.
- Don't brake, unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Steer gently in the direction that the rear end of the car is skidding. In other words, steer in the direction you want to go.
- Always, always wear your seat belt.

## **Rain and Fog**

Again, it's best if you can avoid driving in these conditions. But if you can't:

- Remember that streets are slickest just after a rain begins.
- Don't use cruise control on rain-slicked roads or in foggy conditions. Turn on your headlights in rain or fog. Don't use your high beam lights in fog.
- Lower your speed.
- In fog, watch the tail lights in front of you carefully, but don't follow too closely. Be especially alert for brake lights.

## Night Driving

Night driving can be especially difficult for the mature driver because of changes in vision. Some tips on handling these obstacles have already been covered under the earlier section, but here are some other helpful guidelines on dealing with night driving:

- Try to stay on streets with which you are familiar.
- Don't look directly into oncoming headlights. Look to the side at the white line or the shoulder of the road.
- Make an extra effort to scan, not just the road ahead, but both sides of the road.
- Use high beams when necessary, but remember to switch back to low beams when you see oncoming vehicles.
- If a vehicle behind you either flashes its high beams at you or leaves them on and follows too closely, slow down and encourage the driver to pass.

## Road Construction

- Lower your speed through all construction zones. Be on the lookout for special posted speeds.
- Increase the distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. Watch for and follow detour signs.
- Don't use cruise control through construction zones.
- Be on the lookout for workers and flagpersons. Follow directions from flagperson or law enforcement officials.

## Sharing the Road with Trucks

To reduce the chance of an accident with a large truck, it is important to understand how to share the road safely with them. Here are a few points to consider when sharing the road with trucks:

- Trucks take much longer to stop than a car travelling at the same speed.
- Trucks make very wide right turns, swinging out to the left before making the turn. Never pass a truck without carefully watching for turn signals first.
- Trucks have more severe blind spots than passenger cars. Always keep in mind that if you cannot see the truck driver in his side mirror, he cannot see you.
- Do not cut into the open space in front of a truck when you are trying to reach an exit or turn.

- Don't linger alongside a truck when passing. If you linger alongside the truck, your position makes it impossible for the trucker to take evasive action if an obstacle appears in the road ahead.
- Don't follow too closely behind a truck.
- Never underestimate the size and speed of an approaching semi-trailer truck. Because of its large size, a semi-trailer truck often appears to be travelling at a slower speed than it actually is. A substantial number of car-truck collisions take place at intersections because the driver of the car does not realize how close the truck is or how quickly it is approaching.

## Sharing the Road with Motorcycles, Bicycles and Other Two-Wheeled Vehicles

Drivers must routinely share the roadway with two-wheeled vehicles such as motorcycles and bicycles. To keep yourself and the two-wheeled traffic safe, remember:

- Motorcycles and bicycles are entitled to the same right-of-way and are required to obey the same traffic laws as are operators of automobiles or trucks.
- Because two-wheeled vehicles are much smaller and more difficult to spot than other vehicles on the road, it is extremely important that you, the automobile driver, be extra alert for two-wheeled vehicles. This is especially true at night or during other low-light times because often bicycles do not have headlights or proper reflectors.
- Two-wheeled vehicles have a much shorter stopping distance than heavier cars or trucks and as a result can stop suddenly. Increase your following distance behind motorcycles or bicycles.

## Following Safely

Rear end crashes are most commonly caused by following too closely. You are responsible for maintaining a safe following distance - one which provides you with sufficient time to stop in an emergency. Use a four-second following distance when following under ideal driving conditions - allow more time under adverse conditions. The four second following distance works at any speed. Here is the way to calculate it:

- a. Watch for when the rear of the vehicle ahead of you passes a sign or a marker.
- b. Start counting: One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three, one thousand and four.
- c. If the front of your vehicle reaches the sign or marker before you stop counting, you are following too closely. The safety factor or following distance is greater if it takes more than four seconds.

## Know Your Limits

Being a safe driver means more than avoiding collisions. It also means paying attention to road conditions and being aware of your own changing abilities. Just a few simple adjustments, such as limiting your driving to certain times or under certain conditions can help protect you and those around you from dangerous collisions.

## Conditional Driving

Conditional driving licences may be issued by the Division of Driver and Vehicle Licensing to allow drivers with changing physical abilities to drive under certain conditions. For example, your conditional licence might allow you to drive during the day and at speeds less than 70 km per hour. This would allow you to still drive in town during the day to activities such as appointments or shopping trips.

With a conditional licence, you can continue to drive, but only under conditions that are comfortable and safe for you and other drivers. For further information on conditional licences, you can call 945-7386.

## Getting Additional Help

There are organizations in Manitoba that offer refresher courses for older drivers. These courses can update you on traffic laws, signs, signals, markings and give practical advice to help you drive safely.

For further information on available courses, contact the following organizations:

- **55 Alive/Mature Driving**, Creative Retirement Manitoba  
Phone: 949-2565
- **Manitoba Safety Council**  
Phone: 949-1085

## When to stop

There are organizations in Manitoba that offer refresher courses for older drivers.

A driver's chronological age is not a good predictor of driving ability. What counts on the road is performance. Here are a few of the signs of diminished capacity for driving safely:

- Having a series of minor collisions or near misses.
- Having wandering thoughts or being unable to concentrate while driving.
- Being unable to read ordinary road signs.
- Having other drivers honk at you frequently.
- Being spoken to about your driving by police, family, and friends.

## Transportation Options

Owning a car is expensive, especially if one seldom drives or drives only short distances. Try this simple exercise. Create a budget for your transportation expenses. You will be surprised at how much mobility you can purchase for your car's annual cost.

Gas and oil	
Maintenance	
Tires	
Depreciation	
Insurance	
Registration/licence fee	
Finance expense	

- If you are considering a move, look for a home that is close to shopping and recreational opportunities.
- Car pool and share the driving with friends and family. There's nothing nicer than sharing a warm car with family and friends!
- Let someone else do the driving. Hop a bus or take a cab!

These and other options will allow you to still get around.

Follow the simple guidelines in this booklet and you, too, can remain an older and wiser driver!

### And Remember -

### Always Wear Your Seat Belt!

\* Adapted with permission from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's Drivers 55 Plus: Check Your Own Performance, Your Keys to Freedom and Safety, and The Older and Wiser Driver; and from the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles' Indiana's Guide for the Mature Driver.