

TO YOUR HEALTH

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On the Road

By Maeve Lobo, LICSW

"Everything in life is somewhere else, and you get there in a car."

- E. B. White

Driving is part of the American way of life. Humming engines and gleaming metal are an integral part of our personal landscape. Images of cars have been captured in iconographic movies like *Giant* and the more gently paced *Driving Ms. Daisy*. Owning a car is almost sacred in our lives. However, as we age our driving skills are constantly changing and need to be periodically reviewed.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, in 2018 there were in excess of forty-five million drivers aged sixty-five and over in the U.S. This is an increase of twenty-six million drivers from twenty years ago. The Healthy Aging Collaborative in Massachusetts (2018) reported that 82% of residents 65 years and older own cars. It also observed that in Bedford between 2012 and 2015 there were 340 car crashes involving adults over the age of sixty-five. This number was significantly higher in Concord and Lexington. Springfield ranked the highest in car accidents involving older drivers. Though older drivers wear seat belts and are less likely to drink and drive, they are more prone to having accidents. The Institute for Highway Safety noted that in 2019, drivers seventy years and older had a higher rate of deaths associated with crashes.

There are numerous factors that affect our driving abilities. The National Institute of Aging highlighted the following issues:

- Stiff joints and muscle weakness cause difficulties turning around or steering the wheel. Arthritis may compromise your ability to drive. Remaining physically active helps

with flexibility and strength. Cars with large mirrors, automatic transmission and power steering certainly keep individuals safer on the road.

- Deteriorating eyesight gives rise to problems while driving. Diseases like Glaucoma, macular degeneration and cataracts cause vision impairment. If these are presenting problems, stop driving at night and avoid sunrise and sunset driving as it obscures lines of vision.
- Hearing diminishes with age and listening to sirens, horns and alarms may become more difficult. Remember to get your hearing checked regularly and keep the noise levels to a minimum in the car.
- Reflexes and reaction time slows down with age. Steering and using foot pedals may take longer to use. Helpful cues are to brake early and leave room between cars. Avoid driving in heavy traffic, and while on the highway move to the right-hand lane. Individuals experiencing a change in their memory may need to consider giving up driving.
- Medications have a serious impact on driving. Besides slowing down reaction time, medications may make you feel drowsy and lightheaded. Always read the medication labels.



Massachusetts has no prescribed age to quit driving. Individuals age very differently, and therefore a person's capabilities and expectation vary. Nevertheless, here are a few indicators to consider when to stop driving.

- Have you had more accidents recently? They can be minor fender benders or scratches to the car.
- Are fellow drivers frequently honking at you?
- Do you think individuals around you are driving too fast or slowly?
- Have you recently been lost while driving?
- Are you confusing the gas and brake pedals?
- Have family and friends mentioned your driving is worrying them?

If the answer is yes, it may be time to re-evaluate your driving skills. Consider doing an assessment. *Keys to Independence* is a program run by the Family Center for Sports and Rehabilitative Therapy at Emerson Hospital. They can be contacted at 978-287-8244.

Massachusetts law requires all drivers over the age of seventy-five to renew their license in person. The RMV has dedicated hours on a Wednesday for anyone over the age of sixty-five to address driving matters. This is by appointment only and can be scheduled online. (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/older-drivers#senior-hours/days-for-license/id-renewal->)

If you are considering an alternative to driving, here are some mobility options:

- CWV Transportation Resources booklet provides helpful information.
- Ridesinsight.org is a website that can be accessed. The toll-free number is 855-607-4337.

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- The Ride, a subsidized door to door service, is overseen by the MBTA. During the pandemic the MBTA collaborated with Uber and Lyft to provide rides at a lower cost.
- Bedford BLT is the local transportation service for Bedford Disabled and Senior Residents.
- Just a reminder for Residents who privately pay for rides that from July 1st the Federal Reimbursement rate is 62.5 cents a mile. The Federal rate is reviewed every six months. A portion of the amount includes the standard depreciation rate set at 26 cents a mile. Most agencies and companies use these guidelines to compensate drivers.

Driving is a tool of self-reliance and provides flexibility. Nonetheless safety on the road should always be a priority. While behind the wheel, do a personal evaluation of your driving skills and consider adapting to a changing environment. Aging is inevitably accompanied by numerous changes, and making modifications promotes a safe and healthy lifestyle.

New Clinic Activities

In the fall the Clinic will be introducing the Mighty Nineties. This will be a drop-in group providing coffee, donuts and a chat. It will be open to anyone in the CWV community who is over the age of ninety. Details will be posted in the monthly calendar.

The Clinic is looking for volunteers to participate in a new CWV reading program. *Sharing Stories* will offer reading sessions to fellow residents who may be vision impaired or be too unwell to read. We hope to have a brain storming meeting in late September to gather ideas. Call Maeve Lobo at the Clinic for details.