

# Driving safely for life

A guide on keeping safe and driving for as long as possible

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This guide is designed to help older drivers think about their driving and make the right decisions to stay safe and independent. It gives advice on how to continue driving safely and comfortably, to help older drivers stay on the road for as long as possible.

The guide was originally researched and written by Rica, with funding from the Department for Transport, the RAC Foundation and the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund.

Rica held focus groups with older drivers and their relatives, and consulted with experts on road safety.



For most people, driving is part of life. Most of us drive every week if not every day and we enjoy driving as much as we rely on it.

There are some downsides to driving: it can be expensive, have an impact on the environment and be risky – for you and your passengers and for other road users.

*I've got to drive.  
I take my wife to her  
hospital appointments.*

*It's my freedom,  
my independence.*

*I love driving. I've  
always had this zest for  
wanting to drive.*

*My family are  
all so far away.*

## Driving and safety

Just about everything involves risk and motoring is no exception. By understanding the risk and taking steps to minimise it you can help you to keep yourself and others safe.

### Things to think about

- driving conditions: time of day, weather, road layout and surface, other road users
- your car: maintenance, design and safety features, accessories and equipment
- yourself: refresher training, experience, health and capabilities and even your mood

You can read more about driving safely on pages 6–7.

## Driving and age

Many older drivers will have long records of safe driving, and the statistics show that drivers over 55 years old are the least likely to be involved in an accident (though the chances of being seriously injured go up from the age of 65, because older people are frailer and more vulnerable).

However, the roads are very different these days with more cars driving faster and more aggressively and new road layouts like multi-lane junctions that some drivers may find confusing. Drivers have particular difficulty with junctions, merging traffic, right turns and busy roads.

Also, many people find their capabilities change as they get older, especially if they are experiencing health problems, and these changes may affect the way you drive.



# Health and wellbeing

*Many things can make driving more difficult and you need to be aware of them so you can make sure you stay safe on the road. Below we discuss what you can do to help.*

## Pain, flexibility and strength

Stiffness, pain or weakness can affect your driving by making it difficult to turn your head to look around you or reach or use the controls. A simple exercise programme can help keep you strong and flexible. Ask your doctor or physiotherapist.

## Eyesight

Your eyesight changes in later life and this may make it harder to see road signs and other road users, especially in low light. Look out especially for motorcycles, bicycles and pedestrians. You may also find it harder to judge your speed or the speed of other road users and to switch your focus between the road and the instruments.

*There's more cars these days, more signs.*

*I'm not comfortable at night any more.*



## Concentration and reactions

You may find it more difficult to concentrate on your driving, and to keep your attention on the right things. Your reactions may get slower and you may find it harder to process information as quickly as you need to.

## Medicines

Medicines can affect your ability to react quickly and think clearly when you're driving. Check with your doctor about any medicines you have been prescribed. Driving under the influence of drugs is a criminal offence, even if they have been prescribed by a doctor, so always read the instructions and ask your doctor if in any doubt.

# The law

## Your safety – your responsibility

It's always the driver's responsibility to make sure they're safe. It's up to you to ensure you are driving within your capabilities and that your car is safe to drive.

## Seeing clearly

To drive you need to be able to see properly. The standard test of eyesight is that you must be able to read a car number plate from 20m (65'8"), with your glasses or contact lenses if you use them. If you cannot do this then you should not be driving, and could be prosecuted. If you're in any doubt you should see an optician or optometrist.

### Free eye test

You can get a free NHS eye test if:

- you're aged 60 or over
- you have diabetes or glaucoma
- you're 40 or over, and your mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter has glaucoma
- you've been advised by an ophthalmologist that you're at risk of glaucoma.



*Everything's so fast  
it's hard to keep up.*

## Medical conditions

If you have a medical condition or disability that affects your ability to drive, you must tell the DVLA (DVA in Northern Ireland). They will assess your fitness to drive using the information you give them and may ask you to have a medical examination or a driving assessment (see page 6).

You may be:

- allowed to keep a full licence
- given a temporary licence, valid for one to three years
- given a licence to drive an automatic car or one with specialist controls
- in extreme cases, refused a licence.

You have to tell the DVLA/DVA if your condition changes in a way that affects the way you drive.

You also need to tell your insurance company about your condition and about the DVLA/DVA's decision.

See page 10 for information about how to contact the DVLA and DVA.

## Self declaration

When you turn 70, the DVLA/DVA will send you a form to renew your licence for three years. You need to declare on this form that you are still fit and able to drive safely, so it remains your responsibility to judge this.

If you're not confident you can make this judgment yourself, you can get professional advice from a Mobility Centre (see page 6).

You will have to renew your licence in this way every three years.

# Safe driving

## Be aware

The first thing is to be aware of how you are driving and whether you need to take steps. You may notice yourself that you are finding driving harder or more frightening, or someone else may have concerns. Many of us fall into bad habits over time and may not be aware of them.

Listen to people if they bring it up with you. They may not be right, but they probably have your best interests at heart, and if they think there is a problem you should at least consider it.

Some people continue driving when they really aren't safe, and this is obviously a problem. But many more people stop driving because they are worried, when they could carry on with a little help and advice.

If you are concerned, but not sure if you have a real problem, you can book a refresher lesson with a driving instructor who is qualified to train experienced drivers or get a professional driving assessment (see box).

## Driving assessments

A driving assessment is not intended to stop you from driving. It is designed to help you to continue driving and keep you safe:

- RoSPA (see page 10) offer an Experienced driver assessment, which is honest, objective and confidential.
- Mobility Centres (see page 10) can give you a professional assessment of your driving and advise you. They will look at your physical ability, eyesight and reactions and tell you if you need to change the way you drive and about any adaptations that would help you to continue driving safely.
- Your local council or police authority or other local groups may also provide driving assessments or advice.

## Change the way you drive

If you find it particularly difficult to drive in certain conditions (eg in the dark, when it's raining, at busy times of day), try to avoid these conditions.

If you need to slow down a bit to give yourself time to react, then do that, especially when you're coming up to a junction or other hazard. Take your time before moving off, making sure you've checked all round. Don't feel pressured by other drivers.

Allow plenty of time for your journey, so you aren't under pressure. Plan your route, including where you will park. Allow time for rests. Don't be afraid to stop – as long as it's safe to do so.



*'The service was friendly, supportive and very professional. It put me at ease when I was very nervous.'*



## Change your car or accessorise

If your car is big or old, you might find it easier to change it for a newer, smaller one. Modern cars have features which are designed to make them easier to drive:

- automatic headlights, wipers etc, anti-dazzle mirrors
- information – heads up display, hazard warning, speed limit information
- parking – sensors and cameras, parking assist
- steering – power steering, variable power steering, traction control, lane keep assist
- acceleration – hill start assist, cruise control, adaptive cruise control
- braking – emergency brake assist, automatic emergency braking.

You can also get accessories and adaptations to help make it easier to drive:

- Satnavs help you navigate.
- People with stiff necks can attach stick-on 'blind spot' mirrors to the door mirrors or panoramic rear view mirrors. These give a greater range of vision behind.
- You can mark different speeds (30, 40, 60) on the speedometer with coloured stickers to make them easier to see.
- Steering balls or spinners let you steer with one hand, and can make it easier to hold the wheel.
- Adjustable seating, with lumbar support, and adjustable steering wheel position help keep you comfortable and in control. Make sure you can sit comfortably and push the pedals all the way down without pain. You need to be able to see clearly over the steering wheel.

- More specialist adaptations are available for people who have difficulty operating the controls or getting in and out.

## Drive less

If you are finding it difficult or tiring to drive, or you are concerned about safety, you can just drive less or stop driving altogether.

Some people will find this difficult to do, because of where they live or the places they need to travel to. Also bear in mind that other ways of getting around, especially walking, are risky too, so if you are unsure get some advice before stopping driving altogether (see page 6).

For many people who find themselves having to stop driving unexpectedly, it comes as a shock and it is difficult to adjust. It's a good idea to plan ahead for this possibility:

- Think about things like where you live, how you shop and your other transport needs. How could you manage if you had to stop driving, perhaps temporarily? Do you know what public and community transport is available locally?
- If you're thinking about moving house, choose carefully where you move to. What are the transport links like? Could you manage without a car if you had to?
- If your partner usually drives, make sure you keep your hand in, in case they have to stop.

Rica has information about choosing a car and specialist adaptations in printed guides and on our website. See inside back cover for details.

# Alternatives to driving

*All these alternatives can be used to replace some or all of your driving. It's a good idea to try them out well before you start thinking about stopping driving. Talk to friends who use them, and maybe go along with them to try them out.*

## Walking and cycling

For shorter journeys you may be able to walk or go by bicycle.

## Mobility scooters

Mobility scooters suit some people for shopping or for longer trips by road. You still need to be able to control them and to see properly and react in time to what's going on around you.

Always get professional advice before getting a scooter, and think carefully about how you are going to use it:

- will you use it on the road or the pavement?
- will you have to get on a bus or train?
- where will you charge it and store it?



Rica has information and advice about choosing a mobility scooter and which models fit on buses, trains and trams. Your local Mobility Centre (see page 10) can give you an assessment and personalised advice.

## Public transport

Public transport is much more accessible for everybody these days. There is also a wide range of fare concessions and free passes available, especially for older people. Train travel has a reputation for being expensive, but if you book ahead and use railcards (see page 10) you can usually save a lot of money. Rica has online information about public transport for older people: [www.rica.org.uk](http://www.rica.org.uk).

*It's the other drivers.  
People are so rude these  
days, less patient.*





## Community transport

Community transport is provided by local councils or voluntary groups and includes local bus, dial a ride and social car schemes and hospital transport services. It varies from place to place, but can provide a useful service. Contact your council or hospital trust to ask about this.

## Taxis and minicabs

Taxis and minicabs can be very useful, and give you some independence. Many people think of taxis as unaffordable luxuries, but that needn't be true. The costs of owning and running a car (including maintenance, insurance etc) mean that for many people it is significantly cheaper to get rid of the car and just use taxis or minicabs for all their journeys. Your council might also operate a taxi card scheme that makes it much cheaper to use local cabs.

## Lifts

You can get lifts with friends or family. You can always offer something in return if it makes you feel more comfortable.

## The internet

The internet is a fantastic way of keeping in touch with people and of shopping for goods and services. If you've got a computer and a few accessories you can talk to people online for free with programmes like Skype. If you want to develop or refresh your IT skills, Age UK ([www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)), Digital Unite ([digitalunite.com](http://digitalunite.com)) and UK Online ([www.ukonlinecentres.com](http://www.ukonlinecentres.com)) can help you find local courses. Your council or library or local voluntary groups may also offer courses.

# Useful organisations

## National organisations and services

### Disabled Persons Railcard

If you qualify for the Disabled Persons Railcard, you get 1/3 off most rail fares throughout Great Britain. Travel with an adult companion and they also can get 1/3 off their rail fare. £20 for one year or £54 for three.

**Tel** 0345 605 0525

**Textphone** 0345 601 0132

**Email** disability@atoc.org

[www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk](http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk)

### Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

Government agency responsible for issuing driving licensing enquiries. Has information regarding driving with particular medical conditions.

**Tel** 0300 790 6801

**Fax** 0300 123 0784

[www.gov.uk/dvla](http://www.gov.uk/dvla)

### Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland (DVANI)

**Tel** 0300 200 7861

**Email** dva@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/motoring)

### The Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM)

The UK's leading road safety charity, dedicated to increasing skills for road users and raising driving standards. They offer driving assessments and training for confident driving.

**Tel** 0300 303 1134

[www.iam.org.uk](http://www.iam.org.uk)

### Mobility Centres – Driving Mobility

A network of independent, accredited Mobility Centres which can assess your driving and give you advice about how to make it safer, easier and more comfortable.

**Tel** 0800 559 3636

**Email** info@drivingmobility.org.uk

[www.drivingmobility.org.uk](http://www.drivingmobility.org.uk)

### Older Drivers Forum

Online forum with useful information and resources

[www.olderdrivers.org.uk](http://www.olderdrivers.org.uk)

### Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

The RoSPA Road Safety Department produces advice and information on all areas of road safety and accident prevention.

**Tel** 0121 248 2000

**Email** help@rospa.com

[www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)

### Senior Railcard

Gives anyone over 60 1/3 off most rail fares throughout Great Britain. £30 for one year or £70 for three.

**Tel** 0345 3000 250

**Email** railcardhelp@railcards-online.co.uk

[www.senior-railcard.co.uk](http://www.senior-railcard.co.uk)

### Shopmobility – National Federation of Shopmobility

Shopmobility is a scheme which lends manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs and mobility scooters to members of the public with limited mobility to shop and to visit leisure and commercial facilities in towns, cities or shopping centres.

**Tel** 01933 229 644

**Email** shopmobility@bhta.com

[www.nfsuk.org](http://www.nfsuk.org)



## FAMILY CARS

Issues affecting families of disabled children and with information about cars and standard and specialist equipment



## GETTING A WHEELCHAIR INTO A CAR

Equipment to help you stow or carry a wheelchair in a car, including ramps, hoists, racks and trailers



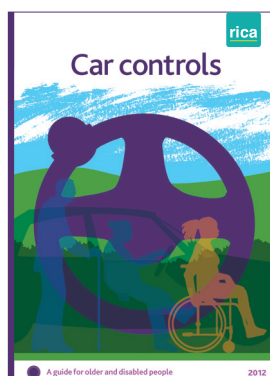
## WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES

Information on vehicles converted to allow you to travel in your wheelchair, as a passenger or driver



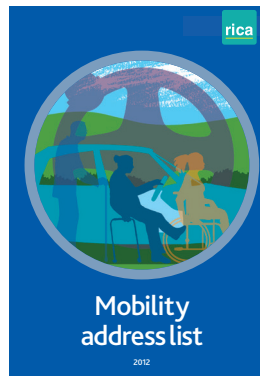
## GETTING IN AND OUT OF A CAR

Techniques that may help as you get older; helpful equipment and details of lifting systems if you need more help



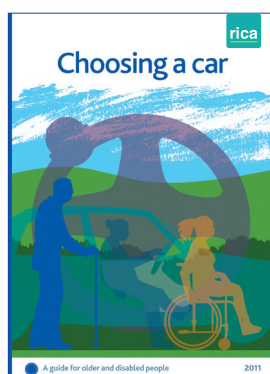
## CAR CONTROLS

Information on types of adaptations and how to get them; it covers simple and more complex conversions and controls



## MOBILITY ADDRESS LIST

Addresses of all adaptation suppliers, fitters and converters in the UK and the services they offer



## CHOOSING A CAR

Things to think about if you have a disability, details of features that may help you and ways of adapting a car to suit your needs

## SEVEN SHORTER GUIDES

- Motoring after an amputation
- Motoring after a brain injury
- Motoring after a stroke
- Motoring with arthritis
- Motoring with cerebral palsy
- Motoring with multiple sclerosis
- Motoring with restricted growth



**Consumer research for older and disabled people**

Rica is an independent research charity that publishes practical consumer information.

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