



Transport
Roads & Traffic
Authority



Worried about
the driving
ability of an
older driver?

While age is not the sole indicator of driving ability, there is evidence that the skills needed for safe driving begin to deteriorate as we get older, particularly from about 75 years of age. Additionally, conditions such as dementia may affect a person's ability to drive safely.

If you are concerned about the driving ability of an older driver, this brochure offers some helpful advice and explains some of the options available to deal with this sensitive issue.

Approaching the issue

For many older people, driving has been an important part of their lifestyle for many years and giving up their right to drive can be a serious and upsetting step. Please consider the following when addressing this issue:

Make sure that their driving skills really are unsafe

Like all drivers, the skills and confidence of older drivers vary from person to person. Some of the things that indicate unsafe driving are impaired vision or hearing and reduced alertness and ability to react quickly.

It is important not to mistake cautious and courteous driving for reduced ability to drive due to age.

Be sensitive

Rather than accusing someone of driving unsafely, talk to them openly and tell them that there are other options available to them.

Help them evaluate their own skills

It may be more appropriate for the older driver to evaluate their own skills. The RTA produces a comprehensive 'Guide to older driver licensing' booklet.

The role of the RTA

The most important part of the RTA's role is to ensure that the NSW roads are as safe as possible. Part of that role involves requiring drivers to undergo a medical and driving test. For car drivers, annual medical reviews are required from 75 years of

age and biennial driving tests from 85 years of age. This is to ensure that older drivers are medically fit and are able to drive competently and safely.

Approaching the issue

If you and/or the older driver you know believe that their driving skills have deteriorated with age, there are several options to consider:

Licence options

If an older person has competent driving skills but is no longer up to driving in more challenging situations – eg over long distances or in heavy traffic – the RTA can issue a modified licence which still allows them to continue driving under some circumstances.

For example, a modified licence which allows the licence holder to drive within a certain distance from their home. They should discuss these options with the RTA motor registry manager.

Doctors are also in a good position to help by advising older drivers of the implications for safe driving from declining capabilities or other medical conditions.

Some older drivers may have a licence that they no longer need eg a heavy vehicle licence. They can have their licence changed to a regular Class C licence at no cost by simply advising any motor registry.

If an older person no longer wants to drive, they can return their licence to a motor registry in person or by mail. They may exchange their licence for a NSW Photo Card at no fee.

Alternative transport

For older people whose driving skills have deteriorated, public transport is a safer option. Details on government bus, train and ferry services are available by calling 131 500.

Additionally, a variety of local transport options are available in most areas. Check with your local council, senior citizens clubs and community groups for local services. Relatives or friends may also be in a position to provide transport.

Informing the RTA

Some older drivers know when to stop driving. Others will listen to the advice of family and friends.

However, in some cases, it may be best to inform the RTA if you are concerned that an older person is no longer driving safely. You should speak to the person before deciding to contact a motor registry. You can ask for and complete an 'Unsafe Driving Report' providing the driver's name, date of birth, current address and licence number if known.

You will also be required to provide your name and address, which the RTA will take all possible steps to keep confidential, except in accordance with relevant privacy legislation and court requirements. The RTA will then contact the driver and may ask them to have a medical examination and/or a driving test.

For further enquiries:

www.rta.nsw.gov.au

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