

Alcohol, Medications, Driving & the Older Adult

How's my driving?

Take this test and ask yourself these questions:

- Am I experiencing an increasing number of near collisions?
- Have I been directly involved in minor collisions?
- Do I have difficulty driving through intersections, judging distance or seeing pedestrians, signs or other vehicles?
- Do I have difficulty concentrating while driving?
- Do I get lost or disoriented on familiar roads?
- Do I have difficulty coordinating hand and foot movements?
- Am I experiencing vision problems, especially at night?
- Do I get nervous behind the wheel?
- Do other motorists frequently honk at me?
- Do family members express concern about my driving ability?
- How important is driving to me?

Your answers to these questions can help you decide whether to continue to drive, cut back to certain times such as daylight hours, or stop driving altogether. If you have answered yes to one or more of the warning signs and are concerned about your driving ability, talk to your doctor or family and get their opinions.

From CAA Ontario "How's your driving" – Safe Driving for Seniors



Mocktail Recipe

Serve your guests a healthy, non-alcoholic drink next time they come over for a visit...

Gentle Breeze

- 4 oz 100% unsweetened cranberry or cranberry-apple blend juice
 - 2 oz 100% unsweetened grapefruit juice
 - 2 oz soda water
 - Ice cubes
- Just mix in glass and serve

How Medications affect Driving

Older drivers take more medication than younger ones. Many of these medications cause drowsiness, decrease energy and slow down reaction times. Medications such as sleeping pills, sedatives, antihistamines, antidepressants and painkillers can cause dizziness and drowsiness. In addition to avoiding driving and operating machinery, people on these types of medications should also avoid excessive alcohol intake. The dizziness and drowsiness these medications can cause is made much worse when used in combination with alcohol. This can lead to an increased risk of falls, car accidents, coma and even death.

From Carolyn Murray, Pharmacist, Muskoka Pharma Plus, Bracebridge

But... I used to be able to do that!!!

Well... maybe your body has changed over the years and this changes your capacity to drive:

- Older drivers have weaker muscles, reduced flexibility and a limited range of motion which limits their ability to grip and turn the steering wheel, press the accelerator or brake or reach to open doors and windows.
- 80% of people in their 70s suffer from arthritis, which makes turning, flexing and twisting painful.
- A 60 year old requires 10 times more light to drive than a 19 year old.
- The ability to change focus also goes down with age. Young drivers need two seconds to adjust focus from near to far, such as looking from the speedometer to the road ahead. Drivers over 40 take three seconds or more, with more time needed as they age.
- Older drivers are more sensitive to glare because the eye changes. Compared to a 16 year old, a 55 year old takes eight times longer to recover from glare.
- Colors become harder to see, especially red. Some older drivers take twice as long to see the flash of brake lights as younger drivers.
- Peripheral vision narrows with age and depth perception goes down. The depth perception affects the ability to judge how fast other cars are moving.

From "How to Help an Older Driver" from AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Effects of Alcohol for Older Adults

Did you know that two adults of the same size but of different age can be affected differently from the same quantity of alcohol? Older adults will be more affected because of the following body changes:

- Older adults have less water in their bodies and alcohol is water soluble. The concentration of alcohol is therefore higher for the same quantity of alcohol taken.
- Aging increases the sensitivity to alcohol, particularly in the central nervous system.
- Aging slows down the metabolism of alcohol in the digestive system. It therefore takes longer to process each drink.

In addition to this, in many cases, older adults will have at least one chronic illness that will affect the impact of alcohol on them.

Asserting Yourself

You may find yourself attending social events where alcohol is served. Perhaps you are not the one driving but your husband, wife, family member or friend is doing the driving. Here are some tips to prevent riding with a drinking driver.

1. Suggest to your driver that you take a taxi to the event, so that you can enjoy yourselves and not worry about driving home afterwards (in the dark, in the winter weather, or in case the driver would like to drink)
2. Ask one of your children to be your "chauffeur" to and from the event.....heaven knows you've been theirs many times over the years!
3. Ask a friend who is driving but not drinking if you could all travel together to and from the event..."the more the merrier!"
4. If you are traveling perhaps to another city, suggest taking the bus or train.....suggest how much nicer it would be to enjoy the sights together and not have to concentrate on the road and traffic....also again one would not have to drive in the dark or worry about winter weather as well.

This newsletter was prepared by:



with representatives from:

*Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit
Caregivers Muskoka/Parry Sound
Bill Coon, Muskoka Medical Centre
Pharmacy*

All references are available upon request. Please feel free to copy and share this newsletter with others.

For more information about RISK, contact the Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit at (705) 789-8813, ext. 225.

For help with alcohol, drugs or mental illness issues, please contact Addiction Outreach (listings in local phone book) or the CAMH Information & Support Line at 1-800-463-6273