



MaineDOT Flash Facts

Topic: Older Driver Issues

Facts:

- Maine has the third highest average resident age in the U.S.
- Over 100,000 Maine licensed Maine drivers are aged 70 and over (1 out of 10 Maine drivers).
- Studies show drivers have fewer crashes as they gain experience with age...*up to a point*. However, the crash rate starts to increase as people reach their seventies.
- Studies of Maine crashes show the estimated crash rate at age 78 is more than double that of drivers aged 65. Drivers in their early eighties have about triple the crash rate of a 65 year old.
- From 2002-2004, drivers aged 70 and older were involved in nearly 11,000 crashes. These crashes resulted in 126 fatalities and about 5,300 injuries. (The 126 fatalities are more than 20% of all Maine crash fatalities.)

If you are a driver over 70, compare yourself today to when you were younger in the following areas. All of these items are important if you are going to be a safe driver.

1. **Vision** (Clear vision, peripheral vision, night vision and ability to adjust to sudden changes in light.) Glaucoma hinders the ability to read signs
2. **Physical flexibility** (Decreased flexibility makes it harder to turn and look back; it could also affect your ability to steer and brake)
3. **Medications** (Can affect both mental and physical abilities. Talk to your physician or pharmacist about your prescriptions and driving)
4. **Reaction time** (Everyone's reflexes become slower as they age.)
5. **Decision-making** (Can become more difficult or time-consuming.)
5. Past or current **medical conditions** (May affect your driving ability.)
6. **Ability to judge speed** (Diminishes with age.)
7. **Multi-processing** (Judging distance and speed becomes increasingly difficult with age.)



Protect yourself and others by knowing your limitations and not taking chances on the road.

Drivers aged 70 and older are most at risk in the following situations:

- **Intersections**-Older drivers are involved in crashes nearly twice as often as other drivers. (30% of all Maine crashes occur at intersections, but for drivers over 70, that number increases to 43%).
- **Rear end crashes** - (The percentage of rear end crashes involving older drivers is 25% higher than the statewide average. Causal factors for older drivers include inattention/ distraction, following too close, and failure to yield. Older drivers need to watch the traffic ahead and maintain a safe following distance. They also should not slow or stop suddenly which causes problems for the vehicles behind.)
- **Yielding the right of way**
- **Turning (especially left turns)** (Older drivers have difficulty judging speed and distance.)
- **Lane changing**
- **Head-on crashes** - (Head-on crashes are the deadliest type for drivers in this age group. They occur due to inattention/distraction, speed, and improper passing. Nearly one quarter of these crashes occur at intersections.)
- **Using highway ramps** (Older drivers have difficulty turning their heads to look over their shoulder in merge situations, due to arthritis.)

Be especially careful in these situations if you are an older driver.

Tips for older drivers can use to keep themselves and others safe on our roads.

Driving is a complicated task. If you are not mentally or physically up to it, you can be a danger to yourself and others on the road.

Warning signs that your driving skills may be slipping:

- Increase in near misses and even crashes (including minor bumps).
- Getting lost (even in familiar areas).
- Cars or pedestrians seeming to appear out of nowhere.
- Getting confused or uncomfortable at busy intersections.
- Difficulty with eyes adjusting to headlights.
- Difficulty reading signs.



Some tips for older drivers (many of these apply to all ages as well):

- Do not drive when you are under stress.
- Leave plenty of room between you and the car ahead.
- Travel streets you are familiar and comfortable with.
- Reduce speed to allow time for your eyes to adjust from light to dark conditions.
- Drive when you are rested.
- Avoid distractions when driving.
- Plan ahead and travel when weather and light conditions are good.
- Avoid busy times of the day.
- Arrange for other transportation when in doubt.

Driving privileges are so important in today's society, but your health and safety are even more vital. If you have concerns about your driving skills, consult with your physician and your family.