# In the driving seat

How to keep driving safely



Let's change how we age

## Information written with you in mind.

Our guides are produced with the help of older people, carers and expert peer reviewers.

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Their feedback helps us ensure that our information is as useful as possible for older people and their carers, family and friends.

www.ageuk.org.uk/readers-panel

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## What this guide is about

For many people, driving is about more than just getting from A to B. It can be a big part of feeling independent – so it's normal to want to keep driving for as long as you can.

Getting older doesn't necessarily mean you have to give up driving, and there's no legal age at which you have to stop. Unless you have a medical condition that affects your driving, it's down to you to decide whether you still feel safe behind the wheel. That said, there are some things to keep in mind.

This guide explains your legal obligations when it comes to driving, including some of the medical conditions you must declare. It outlines how and when to renew your licence, and covers ways you can keep driving safely for longer.



All of the information in this guide applies in England. This symbol indicates where it differs for Wales and Northern Ireland. If you're in Scotland, contact Age Scotland for advice.

It's great to feel confident on the road – but this shouldn't be the only measure of whether you should keep driving. If you've been driving for years, you might still feel confident even if there are other reasons you should think about stopping.

This guide also helps you recognise when it's time to stop driving and outlines other ways to get around and stay independent.

"I've been driving for over 60 years but recently I've started to think about whether I'm safe to carry on – or if it's worth the hassle."

Paul, 84





## **Next steps**

We refer to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) a lot in this guide. Here are the contact details:

Licensing enquiries: **0300 790 6801** Medical conditions: **0300 790 6806** 

In Northern Ireland, contact the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) on **0300 200 7861**.



## Staying safe behind the wheel

Even if you feel safe behind the wheel, you're required to renew your driving licence when you turn 70 – and every 3 years after that. These renewals can be a good time to think about whether you're still able to drive safely.

## Renewing your licence at 70

It's important that you renew your licence when you're required to. If it expires and you don't apply for a new one, you aren't legally allowed to drive.

You can renew your licence online, or by filling in a form and posting it to the DVLA. Renewing is free, so you don't need to worry about any extra costs.

## Renewing by post

The DVLA should send you a D46P application form 90 days before your 70th birthday. You need to complete and return it to renew your driving licence. If you don't receive a D46P form, you can use a D1 application form, which are available at post offices or online at **GOV.UK**. Postal applications take up to 3 weeks.

You may need to send the DVLA a recent passport-style photo with your application. You can check what the guidelines are online at www.gov.uk/photos-for-passports/photo-requirements.

## Renewing online

Go to www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence-at-70 to renew your driving licence online. When you register, you're given a user ID code and step-by-step instructions. If you have a valid passport, you don't need to submit a photo. Your new licence should arrive within a week.



In Northern Ireland, if you're aged 60 or over and your licence is due to expire before your 70th birthday, you're issued a new licence. This new licence is valid for 3 years, or until your 70th birthday – whichever is longer. You'll then need to apply to the DVA to renew it. The DVA should send you a DL1 application form around 2 months before your licence expires. If you don't receive one, call the DVA to order one.



## **Next steps**

Visit www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence-at-70 for more information. In Northern Ireland, get more information at www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/renew-your-driving-licence.

## **Declaring medical conditions**

When you renew your driving licence, you must declare certain medical conditions and confirm you meet the eyesight standards for driving – this is a legal duty.

The medical conditions you must declare include:

- dementia
- insulin-treated diabetes
- Parkinson's disease
- epilepsy
- chronic neurological conditions (such as multiple sclerosis)
- · conditions that affect both eyes
- sight loss in one or both eyes.

You might need to declare other health conditions, depending on your licence type and how the condition affects you. If you're unsure, ask your doctor for advice.

It's understandable to feel reluctant to declare a health issue that could stop you from driving, but it's the law – it's to make sure that you and other drivers are safe on the road.



## **Next steps**

See www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving for a full list of medical conditions and disabilities you must declare. In Northern Ireland, contact the DVA. Contact Alzheimer's Society (page 27) for more information about driving and dementia.

If you're worried about a medical condition you have that isn't listed on the previous page, it can be a good idea to tell the DVLA anyway – even if you haven't noticed any difference in your driving. The same applies if you have a condition that has worsened since your licence was issued.

You can check the guidance relating to different medical conditions at www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving/find-condition-a-to-z. You can also ask your doctor for advice.

You might think it can wait until your next renewal, but you could be fined if you don't declare a medical condition that affects your driving. And if you have an accident where your health condition may have been a factor, you might be prosecuted – and your insurance might not cover you.

You might worry that you'll lose your licence if you tell the DVLA about a condition, but this usually isn't the case. There are often changes you can make that allow you to keep driving.

## How your licence might be affected

After you tell the DVLA about your medical condition, they do one of the following:

- make a decision about whether you're still safe to drive, based on the information you've provided
- ask your doctor or consultant for more information (with your permission)
- arrange for a doctor or specialist to examine you
- ask you to take a driving assessment, eyesight check or driving appraisal (see pages 15-17 for more information).

## What happens next?

If the DVLA decide you're safe to keep driving, they might:

- send you a new licence to replace your old one, with a letter stating that you can continue to drive as before
- send you a short-term licence (valid for 1-5 years, depending on your circumstances)
- send you a temporary driving licence to use during a mobility centre driving assessment (see page 15)
- send you a licence that says your car must be fitted with certain adaptations.

If you're given a new licence, you should return your old one to the DVLA.

If there are any changes to your licence or if you have to make adaptations to your car, then you should tell your insurance provider as soon as possible. If you don't, you could end up with a fine and your insurance policy being void.

If the DVLA's enquiries confirm you're no longer safe to drive, they can tell you to stop. This can be a real worry at first – but it doesn't mean an end to your independence. There are other ways you can get around (see pages 21-25).

"I was told I could keep driving, I just needed a few adaptations to my car." Mary, 80



## **Driving safely**

Older drivers are generally a safe group on the roads, as experience tends to balance out issues such as slower reactions. But experience alone isn't always enough to keep you safe.

In this section, we cover some of the key things you should consider when thinking about safe driving.

## Sight and hearing

It's important to get your eyes tested every 2 years (or more often, if advised) and your hearing checked frequently.

In order to drive, you must be able to read a number plate from a distance of 20 metres, have an adequate field of vision, and have a visual acuity (measured using a Snellen chart) of at least 0.5. This can be with glasses or contact lenses, if you use them. If you don't meet these requirements and you have an accident, you might be fined or prosecuted and you might not be covered by your insurance policy.

If you need to wear glasses or contact lenses to meet the legal standards of vision for driving, the code 01 will be added to the back of your photocard licence.

## **Medicines**

Lots of medicines can affect driving ability. Ask your doctor or pharmacist whether drowsiness is a side effect of any medicines you take and whether you can continue to drive. It's a criminal offence to drive if a medication affects your driving ability.

## Driving at night

Driving at night can be more dangerous than driving during the day due to more limited visibility, dazzle from oncoming traffic, and simply feeling tired. Think about whether there are any alternative transport options you could use.

If you do need to drive at night, one good tip is to keep your eyes moving. By scanning the road instead of only looking straight ahead, you'll see lights around bends or at upcoming junctions and have a better idea of what's approaching.

If the lights of an oncoming vehicle dazzle you, try not to panic. Glance down towards the left side of the road. You should be able to see the edge of the road or the painted edge line, which will help you stick to your path until the vehicle passes.



#### Your car

As well as servicing your car regularly and taking it for its annual MOT, you should also consider the following:

- If you bought your car some time ago, is it still suitable for your needs?
- Could you choose an automatic car, or one with features such as power steering, parking sensors and cameras, blind spot mirrors or bigger windows?
- Could some adaptations to your car help?

## Your confidence and knowledge

If you change car, consider having a driver assessment or driver training in your new one – especially if you swap from a manual to an automatic. It could help you feel more confident.

Many local councils offer refresher driver training. You can search for schemes near you on the Older Drivers website (page 29) or you can contact IAM RoadSmart (page 28).

The Highway Code may have changed since your test. You can read it online at www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code. In Northern Ireland, visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/highway-code. Alternatively, you could buy a copy from a local bookshop.

## Your driving reflexes

You should consider your coordination and motor skills too. Have a think about the following questions:

- Can you react quickly enough to sudden changes, such as a car pulling out in front of you?
- Can you still focus on multiple things at once, such as changing gears and looking for oncoming traffic?
- Do you have any problems turning to check your blind spot?

If you're not sure whether you're still safe on the roads, it might be a good idea to have your driving ability reassessed (see pages 15-17) or to look at alternatives to driving (see pages 21-25).



## **Next steps**

For more information, visit the Older Drivers website (page 29). The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) (page 29) has a guide called **Driving safely for life** that could be helpful too.

# Assessment and staying on the road

Having a driving assessment can help reassure you, and those around you, that you're a safe driver.

## **Driving assessment**

You might not feel like you need an assessment, or you might feel anxious about having one, but there's nothing to worry about. It's not a test and there's no 'pass' or 'fail'. It could actually help you stay driving safely for longer.

The aim of the assessment is to make sure you and others on the road are as safe as possible, to get you any support you might need, and to help you feel confident in your driving skills and ability. You might be able to try out adaptations to help you figure out what works for you.

You might decide to have a driving assessment to boost your confidence and get advice on how to keep driving for longer. But the most likely reason for having a driving assessment is because the DVLA require you to have one to check whether you meet the medical standards for driving.



## Good to know

If you're having your driving ability reassessed due to a medical condition, ask your doctor if you can continue driving while you wait for your assessment.

#### What does the assessment involve?

The driving assessment includes:

- a physical assessment to check the range of movement in your arms, legs, head and neck
- a cognitive assessment to check your thinking skills
- a visual assessment to check your eyesight
- an on-road driving assessment in a dual-controlled car.

If you have a health condition or disability that might affect your driving, the trained staff at the mobility centre can assess how this affects your driving and look at how you could keep driving safely.

## Who pays for the assessment?

If you've been asked to have an assessment after declaring a medical condition, the DVLA pay for it. If not, you'll need to pay for it yourself. The cost varies depending on the centre.



In Northern Ireland, assessments are carried out at Disability Action's mobility centre (page 27).



#### Outcomes of the assessment

If the assessment shows that a medical condition makes it unsafe for you to drive, the DVLA can tell you to stop. They should explain why they've made this decision.

If it's possible your condition will improve, they'll explain when you can reapply for a driving licence. If and when you do reapply, talk to your doctor first, as you'll need to provide medical evidence showing your condition has improved.

If you're told to stop driving altogether, you'll be given details of your right to appeal to a magistrates' court.

Let your insurance provider know if you stop driving. If you're taking some time away from driving because of a health condition rather than stopping completely, your provider may be able to suspend your insurance rather than cancel it.

## **Adaptations**

The assessor might decide that adaptations could help you with driving or with getting in and out of your car. They can then help you plan any necessary changes. These adaptations can be things like pedal extensions or different switches for windscreen wipers.

You might get the chance to try out different types of adaptations to see how they suit you.

Let your insurance provider know if you make any adaptations to your car, as it could affect your policy – and tell the DVLA too.



## **Good to know**

To find your nearest mobility centre, contact Driving Mobility (page 27).

## Help to keep you on the road

If you have a condition or disability that makes it difficult to drive or get in and out of your car, there are ways to make things easier – such as changing your vehicle, making adaptations to it, or using specialist equipment.

The kind of equipment available includes:

- car key holders
- adaptive vehicle controls
- · hoists to lift you and your wheelchair
- cushions, swivel seats or a Handybar to help you get in and out.

Contact Driving Mobility (page 27) to find a local mobility centre and get advice on suitable vehicles and adaptations, as well as help returning to driving after an illness.

You can sometimes make modifications to car doors and seats too. Contact Driving Mobility, Motability or the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) to find out what's available. See pages 26-30 for contact details.

## **Motability Scheme**

If you receive the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance, the enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment, or the War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement, you can use your mobility allowance to lease a car, wheelchair or scooter at an affordable price through the Motability Scheme. This is run by the charity Motability (page 28).

You might also get VAT relief on the cost of leasing and adapting your car. Motability holds open days called Motability Scheme Live – call their helpline for more information.

## The Blue Badge scheme

If you or a passenger in your car have reduced mobility or other disabilities – including 'hidden' disabilities – the Blue Badge scheme allows you to park more conveniently. If you have a Blue Badge, you're exempt from certain parking restrictions and can use designated parking spaces.

The scheme operates differently in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and is managed by local councils – so check whether there are any additional restrictions in the area you're travelling to. There are certain London boroughs which offer their own parking concessions in place of the scheme.

In England and Wales, Blue Badge holders can generally park:

- free of charge at on-street parking meters and in Pay and Display bays (although in Wales, it's worth double-checking with the relevant local council as there may be some variation in the rules)
- on single or double yellow lines for up to 3 hours, except where there's a ban on loading or unloading.



## **Next steps**

In England, you can apply for or renew a Blue Badge online at **GOV.UK** (page 28) or contact your local council for an application form. In Wales, you can apply online at www.gov.wales/apply-or-renew-blue-badge. In Northern Ireland, go to www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-or-renew-blue-badge-online.

## If you stop driving

You might have been told to stop driving, or you might have made the decision yourself. Whatever the reason, it can take time to adjust to not using your car.

## **Deciding to stop driving**

If your driving skills aren't what they used to be or you aren't as confident on the road, it could be time to think about stopping driving. If you've been told by the DVLA or your doctor it's time to stop driving, you must do so immediately.

If you've been driving for a long time, it's normal to feel a sense of loss or frustration. You might worry that you won't be able to do all the things you used to, such as grocery shopping or visiting family and friends. But you might also feel relieved to be free of the responsibility that comes with driving, and of the cost and admin involved in keeping your car on the road and maintaining it.

Whatever the situation, it's always better to stop before you become unsafe on the road.

"I still felt confident behind the wheel, but my wing mirrors and bumper told a different story. It was one scrape too many." Terry, 82





## Other ways to get out and about

Giving up driving doesn't have to mean giving up your independence. There are many other ways to get around and keep in touch with friends and family.

If you can, try out new transport methods before you stop driving completely. That way, you'll know what form of transport suits you best and you'll know what you need to allow for, such as timings and costs.

## Will using public transport cost more?

You might be worried about the cost or inconvenience of using public transport. But if you add up the amount you spend on car tax, insurance, maintenance and fuel in a year, you'll probably find that the cost of using public transport works out the same as – or even cheaper than – running a car. Some public transport is free for older people and there are lots of discounts available for those aged 60 or over.



## **Next steps**

The Older Drivers website (page 29) has a calculator to help you estimate the cost of running your car compared with alternative methods of transport.

## **Travel by bus**

In England, older people and some disabled people are entitled to a bus pass for free off-peak travel on local buses. You can get an older person's bus pass when you reach State Pension age, which is currently 66 for both men and women.



In Wales, people aged 60 or over and disabled people are entitled to a free Concessionary Travel Card for free travel on local buses at any time of the day. If you're disabled and need help to travel, you can request a companion pass. In some areas, the travel pass can be used on certain rail services. You can also get discounted fares on some rail services.

In Northern Ireland, you can get a 60+ SmartPass for free travel on buses and trains. At 65, you can get a Senior SmartPass for free bus and train travel throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

## Travel by coach

If you're aged 60 or over, you can buy a Senior Coachcard from National Express. If you're registered as disabled, you can buy a Disabled Coachcard, which will give you the same savings. Contact National Express (page 28) for more information.

There's currently no national concessionary scheme for coach travel – but you can ask your local coach operator if it offers discounts for older and disabled people.

## **Travel by train**

If you're over 60, you can buy a Senior Railcard which gives you a third off rail fares. If you receive disability benefits or you're registered deaf or visually impaired, you can apply for a Disabled Persons Railcard (page 27), giving you and a companion travel discounts.

Find out if your local council offers a concessionary travel scheme or contact National Rail (page 29).

If you have mobility problems, let staff at the railway stations you're travelling between know in advance. National Rail's Passenger Assist service lets you request assistance in advance. Find out more at www.nationalrail.co.uk/help-and-assistance/passenger-assist.



In Northern Ireland, you can get a 60+ SmartPass for free travel on buses and trains. At 65, you can get a Senior SmartPass for free bus and train travel throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

#### Taxi services

If you like, you can set up an account with a reputable taxi or private hire car company in your area. Check whether they'll give you a discount if you use the company frequently. There's also a growing variety of ride-hailing apps, which allow you to order and pay for a car via your smartphone.

Some local councils offer 'taxi token' schemes for discounted taxi travel if you're over State Pension age and can't use the bus.

#### **Community services**

Some areas have Dial-a-Ride minibus services for people who find it difficult to use public transport, or voluntary car schemes where someone will take you where you need to go for a reasonable cost. Many areas also have schemes to help disabled people get to hospital appointments.

Contact your local council to find out whether these schemes operate in your area. Your local library might also have information about public transport and other transport schemes. You can also contact your local Age UK or Age Cymru.



In Northern Ireland, people who find it difficult to use public transport can use the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) in urban areas, and the Dial-a-Lift and Assisted Rural Transport Scheme in rural areas.



## **Mobility scooters**

If you have trouble walking, you could get a mobility scooter for travelling short distances. A mobility centre can help you choose the right model for you.

Anyone who needs a wheelchair should have access to a self-propelling one provided by the NHS. Speak to your doctor if you think you'd benefit from this. Alternatively, you could borrow an electric wheelchair from a local NHS wheelchair service in England.



In Wales, NHS wheelchairs are provided on a long-term loan basis for free – but what you're eligible for depends on your circumstances. If you want to borrow a particular type of wheelchair for a shorter period, speak to your doctor or another healthcare professional. Call Age Cymru Advice to discuss your options.

Driving Mobility (page 27) trains mobility centres and retailers to ensure you're given comprehensive advice when you're buying a powered wheelchair or mobility scooter. To find one in your area, visit www. drivingmobility.org.uk/useful-information/pwms-trained-retailers.

## Using the internet to stay connected

Some people worry that they'll lose touch with friends and family when they stop driving, but this doesn't have to happen. Don't be afraid to ask people to visit you instead. Technology such as video calling and emailing can also help you to stay in touch.

You can also use the internet to do chores you might once have used your car for, such as shopping and banking. If you aren't confident using the internet, see if your local library or Age UK offers training sessions. In Wales, contact your local Age Cymru.

## **Useful organisations**

## **Age UK**

We provide information and advice for people in later life through our Age UK Advice Line, publications and website.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

www.ageuk.org.uk

In Wales, contact Age Cymru Advice: 0300 303 44 98

www.agecymru.wales

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland: 0800 124 4222

www.agescotland.org.uk

## **Alzheimer's Society**

Offers advice, information and support to people with dementia, their families and carers.

Tel: 0333 150 3456

www.alzheimers.org.uk

## **Disability Action**

Provides a range of services for people living in Northern Ireland, including driving mobility assessments through its mobility centre.

Tel: **028 9029 7880** 

www.disabilityaction.org

## **Disabled Persons Railcard**

Discount card for train travel for eligible people who have epilepsy, visual or hearing impairments, or receive certain disability benefits.

Tel: 0345 605 0525

Textphone: 0345 601 0132

www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

## **Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland (DVA)**

Government agency responsible for licensing and testing vehicles and drivers in Northern Ireland.

Tel: 0300 200 7861

www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/motoring

## **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)**

Government organisation responsible for issuing driving licences.

Tel: **0300 790 6801** (licence enquiries)

Tel: 0300 790 6806 (reporting a medical condition)

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency

## **Driver Mobility**

Network of centres offering assessments, information and advice to disabled people.

Tel: 0800 559 3636

www.drivingmobility.org.uk

#### **GOV.UK**

Government website with details of government services and information, including driving licences.

General information: www.gov.uk

Blue Badge information: www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

In Wales, visit **GOV.WALES** 

Tel: 0300 060 4400

General information: www.gov.wales

Blue Badge information: www.gov.wales/apply-or-renew-blue-badge

In Northern Ireland, contact NI Direct Tel: 0300 200 7818 (Blue Badge Unit)

General information: www.nidirect.gov.uk

Blue Badge information: www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-or-

renew-blue-badge-online

#### **IAM RoadSmart**

Delivers mature driver programmes and an advanced driving test.

Tel: 0300 303 1134

www.iamroadsmart.com

## **Living Made Easy**

Provides information about equipment and aids for daily living.

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

## **Motability**

Scheme for disabled people to lease a car, scooter, powered wheelchair or accessible vehicle with a qualifying mobility allowance.

Tel: 0300 456 4566 www.motability.co.uk

#### **National Express**

Organises coach travel across the UK. Book tickets for coach journeys and find out about Senior and Disabled Coachcards.

www.nationalexpress.com

#### **National Rail**

Gives details of train timetables and tickets. You can book tickets for train journeys through their website.

Tel: 03457 48 49 50 www.nationalrail.co.uk

#### **Older Drivers**

Advice from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to help older drivers.

Tel: 0121 248 2063

www.olderdrivers.org.uk

#### **Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC)**

Publishes reviews of equipment for older and disabled people.

Tel: **020 7427 2460** www.ridc.org.uk

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

Provides advice about road safety and accident prevention, and offers experienced driver assessments.

Tel: **0121 248 2000** www.rospa.com

#### **Senior Railcard**

Discount card for train travel for over-60s. You can visit the website or apply for one at any mainline railway station.

Tel: 0345 3000 250

www.senior-railcard.co.uk

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## Help us be there for someone else

We hope you found this guide useful. When times are tough, it's so important to get some support. You can help us reach everyone who needs us:

- Tell us your story. If Age UK's information and advice has helped you, we'd love to hear about it. Email stories@ageuk.org.uk.
- Donate to us. We rely on donations to support older people when they need us most. To make a donation, call us on 0800 169 8787 or go online at www.ageuk.org.uk/donate.
- Volunteer with us. Our volunteers make an incredible difference to people's lives. Find out more at www.ageuk.org.uk/volunteer or contact your local Age UK.
- Campaign with us. We campaign to make life better for older people, and rely on the help of our strong network of campaigners. Add your voice at www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns.
- Remember us in your will. A gift to Age UK in your will is a very special way of helping older people get expert support in the years to come. Find out more by calling 020 3033 1421 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/legacy.

## What should I do now?

You might want to read some of our relevant information guides and factsheets, such as:

- Adapting your home
- Staying safe
- Staying steady

You can find all of our guides and factsheets on our website, along with lots more useful information. Visit **www.ageuk.org.uk** to get started.

You can order free printed copies of any guide or factsheet by emailing **orders@ageuk.org.uk** or calling our Advice Line on **0800 169 65 65.** Our friendly advisers can also help with any questions.

All of our publications are available on request in large print and audio formats.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the below box, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



0800 169 65 65 www.ageuk.org.uk









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