

Fitness to Drive

Planning for Driving Alternatives When
Reducing or Stopping Driving



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This booklet contains information about:

- The impact of aging on our driving ability
- What defines our fitness to drive
- Our transportation options on PEI
- Planning for changes so we keep our independence and avoid isolation

This booklet is NOT about driving skills, how well we understand and follow the rules of the road, or vacation/recreational travel.

References

Road Safety Canada Consulting. *Road Safety in Canada*. March 2011. document. 12 12 2013.

Turcotte, Martin. *Profile of seniors' transportation habits*. Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008-X. Canadian Social Trends. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2012. document.

The Facts on Driving and Aging

In 2009, there were 19,500 people aged 65 years and older on PEI– 80% of these people had a driver's license.(Turcotte)



As we age, we are more likely to develop health problems. But, not all seniors will have conditions which affect the safety of their driving. (Road Safety Canada Consulting)As a result, age is **not** used as the basis for deciding whether a driver can continue to drive. Rather, **fitness to drive** is based on the driver's physical and mental fitness to drive safely.

Physical and mental changes – when due to aging alone – are NOT enough to make you an unfit or unsafe driver.

Normal Physical Changes Due to Aging

Normal changes due to aging alone do not mean that you are no longer fit to drive. Changes you might see:

Vision: notice glare and find it difficult to see in the dark, or find it difficult to see things in peripheral vision (what you see at the sides when you are looking ahead)

Physical Body: feel weaker, stiff, experience pain or move more slowly

Thinking or Cognition: have difficulty remembering things, making decisions or coping with distractions

Reaction Time: find it difficult to react as quickly as you used to

How Health Changes Affect Driving Ability

It is easy to see how having a sudden health change – like breaking an arm – can affect your ability to drive safely.

- Only one hand/arm to turn the wheel
- More difficult to get in and out of the vehicle
- Less strength or reaction time to emergency steer
- Pain or medications impairing concentration

Some health changes – like arthritis – develop more slowly. You may be able to adjust safely to the changes that occur. Or you may not notice that the changes are reducing your ability to drive safely. You need to think about – *How is the arthritis affecting my ability to drive?*

- Hands – How is your grip strength and ability to steer easily?
- Hips – Is it difficult or painful to move from gas pedal to brake pedal?
- Spine/neck – Are you able to turn for shoulder checks?

Medically At-Risk

A “medically at-risk” driver is a person who, regardless of age, has a medical condition(s) that may negatively affect ability to drive. An assessment, or testing, is needed to determine whether a medical condition(s) makes it unsafe to drive.

In addition, the medications used to treat physical or mental health conditions may also affect your ability to drive.

Not all medical conditions change your ability to drive (e.g., some drivers with diabetes are safe to drive, others are not). How much conditions interfere with driving is determined on a case-by-case basis.

How well your conditions are managed can mean the difference between good driving ability and the loss of your driving privileges. Your responsibility is to work with your health care professionals to maintain your driving fitness.

Working together, you will:

- Drive longer
- Recover from injury or illness more quickly
- Manage any health conditions appropriately so they do not reduce your fitness to drive

The goal is to keep you as a safe and active driver for as long as possible.

Fitness to Drive

Your safety and the safety of others on the road are influenced by your “fitness to drive” – that is your ability to drive safely without problems caused by physical ability, injury, medical or mental health condition, or by medication you are taking.

How will you know when your fitness to drive is a problem? For medical conditions, your health care provider can advise you on any driving restrictions you need to follow. For example, if you have surgery, you may not be permitted to drive until:

- A safe time after surgery medications wear off
- You are physically able to drive without pain, movement restrictions, or until your health is stable
- Your body adjusts to medication

My Fitness to Drive

Maintaining your fitness to drive means that you need to pay attention to **changes**.

Think about your usual driving over the last couple of years (not including long trips or vacations/holidays.)

Consider the following statements and any **changes** you have noticed:

- check "Yes" if you have noticed any **changes** for you;
- check "No" if you have not noticed any changes.

Be **honest** with your answers – your life may depend on it.

Have you noticed any changes in:	Yes	No
How uncomfortable or nervous you are while driving, especially in heavy traffic		
Awareness about your judgement of distances when you are driving at night (such as judging closeness to other vehicles, anticipating when to slow down to turn or stop)		
Difficulty in maintaining concentration, staying alert or staying oriented while driving		
Trouble judging gaps in traffic		
Trouble at intersections		
Near misses while city or highway driving		
Near misses, scrapes or bumps in parking lots - or getting small dents and scratches on your vehicle		

Have you noticed any changes in:	Yes	No
Friends and family not wanting to drive with you		
Difficulty when checking your blind spot before changing lanes		
Getting lost when you are driving		
Having a slower response to an unexpected situation		
Difficulty scanning the road environment for pedestrians, parked cars and hazards		
Feeling that driving is not the pleasure it used to be		
Feeling that driving has become an ordeal		
Difficulty operating the gas pedal or brake due to pain, stiffness, or loss of feeling in feet		
Difficulty driving at certain times of day		

For each “Yes” you checked, consider the **cause** of the changes.

Do you need to:

- Have your health assessed? Don’t minimize problems when talking to your doctor.
- Have your driving assessed? You can ask for testing at any Access PEI locations.

Check for “changes” yearly or more often if you have changes in your health.

Laws on PEI

On PEI, the laws concerning driving are found in the Highway Traffic Act and are administered by the Highway Safety Division of The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

There are medical standards that PEI follows.

PEI follows the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA) Medical Standards for Drivers. These standards are regularly reviewed and updated so they remain current and reflect existing medical opinion.

PEI has its own Highway Safety Medical Board, which includes physicians, who review cases. In addition, if the Highway Safety Registrar believes a driver to be medically unfit to operate a motor vehicle in accordance with the national standards, they may also take action.

There are no mandatory reviews based on age.

Any driving review is based on fitness to drive– not age.

You may be required to have mandatory medical or skills testing based on health issues.

All medical practitioners are required to report a patient who has a medical condition that makes it dangerous for them to drive.

Police and RCMP also report to Highway Safety when they come across someone who is unfit to drive.

You may be required to come for an interview with the Highway Safety Registrar or driver improvement officer or take a test (like you did to get your driver's license) to assess your fitness to drive.

Self-limiting or Driving Restrictions

All drivers are required to restrict or stop driving if they are unfit to drive. "Self-limiting" means to restrict driving by your own choice.

Although many of us are most concerned about having our license taken away from us, in reality, the people at Highway Safety are looking for ways to keep us on the road.

Any necessary restrictions are considered **before** taking a license away. Many of these restrictions are the same ones that people choose when self-limiting their driving. Examples:

- daytime only driving
- only allowed to drive within so many kilometres of home
- not driving on certain highways
- retesting every 3 months or 6 months
- medical or vision exams on a regular basis
- requiring special equipment i.e.: special mirrors, etc.
- temporary restrictions – such as 24 hours following minor surgery or until you are well enough to drive

Anyone's license *can* be denied, reviewed, restricted or revoked – if necessary.

Reporting Concerns about Fitness to Drive

Any reports to the Registrar concerning fitness to drive must be investigated. The Division staff can step in when families or friends are concerned but don't want to confront the driver. Your name will be kept anonymous (not be reported to the driver.)

People avoiding their health care providers in an effort to keep their license, need to understand that this puts them at more risk! **Health care providers try to keep you active!**

Planning for Independence

Reduce or Retire?

You can prepare for a safer future by trying transportation options *before* you must use them.

Start by thinking about your current needs and options.

My Transportation Needs	
What I need or want to do:	Instead of driving myself, my options are:
Pay bills	Mail payment, pay online, ask someone to drop off payment
Attend meeting/concert/visit friend	Get drive with friend, take turns driving, walk, take the bus
Get groceries	Go with family, delivery

Look into these options and try them out now.

What about the costs?

Driving a vehicle costs us **thousands** of dollars each year (car payments, insurance, license/ registration, gas, repairs/ maintenance, parking). That money can go a long way to: buy a bus pass, take taxis, or pay for gas when driving with others.

Transportation Options

Taxis (prices are subject to change)

Consider the benefits of using taxis:

- Someone else doing the driving
- 24-hour service
- In and out of a warm car in winter; cool in summer
- No shoveling snow or scraping ice
- Fast, safe service from door-to-door
- May deliver things to you
- Discounts for seniors or frequent users

Cost:

Within Charlottetown - \$6 to \$12; within Summerside - \$5.50; Kensington or Montague - \$6 to \$8. Outside of these areas may be flat fee or by the kilometre travelled. Call for more information.

Check phone book for phone numbers

Bus Services (prices are subject to change)

Buses run regularly in Charlottetown (Mon-Sat); in Stratford Cornwall, and Summerside (Mon-Fri); and County Line Express Summerside-Charlottetown with stops in Kensington and Hunter River (Mon-Fri). No bus service is available on Sundays.

Cost:

- *for one way travel:* \$2.25; \$2 (if you buy a book of 10 tickets)
- *for unlimited travel:* -bus pass: adult - \$65/month; senior - \$45/month

County Line Express: one-way trip - \$5 to \$9.

Contact by phone 902-566-9962 or on the internet www.triustransit.ca

Ride Sharing

Ride sharing includes everything from asking for a drive with friends and family to getting connected with a formal system.

If you are not used to asking others for help, consider the following:

- Who is going there anyway?
- Would they mind picking you up?
- What can you offer in return? – gas money, snacks, return the favour another way?

If you can't find someone close, then what?

Try contacting local groups – Legion, Lions Club, Senior's Club, church– to see if they offer ride services. Post a notice in a public place looking for a ride. Organize a meeting for interested people through your nearest community centre or community group.

Specialized Transportation

Pat and the Elephant – 902-894-3339 provides transportation service to people with a broad range of challenges. Open 365 days a year, 7a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Vans can accommodate up to 3 wheelchairs + 4 walkers + a driver on all trips.

PEI Cancer Services Volunteer Driving Project – 902-367-2821 or *peicsvdp@gmail.com* provides free rides to Islanders diagnosed with cancer.

PEI Home Care Program(Health PEI) can provide information on driving services and volunteer drivers within the area. Contact local offices in Souris, Montague, Charlottetown, Summerside, and O'Leary.

For More Information

Contact: Centre on Health and Aging 894-2841