

Driving When You Have Parkinson's Disease

You have been a safe driver for years. For you, driving means freedom and control. As you get older, changes in your physical and mental health can affect how safely you drive.

Parkinson's disease is a disorder of the central nervous system that weakens certain nerve cells in the brain over time. It changes the way your body moves. While it can occur at any age, it especially affects people 60 and older.

If you have Parkinson's, it can interfere with your daily activities, including driving safely. Early symptoms vary from person to person, but often include slow movement; stiffness of the arms, legs, or trunk; tremors or shaking while at rest; and problems with balance and falls.

How Can Parkinson's Affect the Way I Drive?

Parkinson's can cause your arms, hands, or legs to shake, even when you are relaxed.

It can make it hard to keep your balance and to start moving when you have been still. It also may prevent you from:

- Reacting quickly to road hazards.
- Turning the steering wheel.
- Using the gas pedal or pushing down the brake when you need to react quickly.
- Driving safely at night because of changes in your vision.

What Should I Do If I Have Any of These Signs?

As soon as you notice any of these warning signs:

- Tell your family or someone close to you.
- Talk to your health care provider about ways to treat your condition. Some drugs may affect your ability to drive safely.
- Stay active. Exercise regularly to strengthen muscles you need to drive safely.

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What Can I Do When Parkinson's Affects My Driving Safety?

It is important to know how Parkinson's is changing your driving safety. Your health care provider may suggest that you see a specialist to help you adjust to these changes.

Two types of specialists can help you:

- **A driver rehabilitation specialist** can test how well you drive on and off the road. This specialist also can help you decide when you need to stop driving. To find a driver rehabilitation specialist, go to www.aota.org/olderdriver. Under "Driving & Community Mobility," click the button in the center of the page marked "Search for a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist." This will link you to a national database. There you can search for names and addresses of local driver rehabilitation specialists.
- **An occupational therapist with special training in driving skills assessment and remediation.** To find an occupational therapist, contact local hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

What Can I Do If I Have to Limit or Stop Driving?

If you have Parkinson's, you still may be able to drive safely during the early stages of the disease. Your health care provider will tell you what to do to manage your symptoms so you stay safe on the road.

Even if you have to limit or give up driving, you can stay active and do the things you like to do.

First, plan ahead. Talk with family and friends about how you can shift from driver to passenger. Below are some ways to get where you want to go and see the people you want to see:

- Rides with family and friends.
- Taxis.
- Shuttle buses or vans.
- Public buses, trains, and subways.
- Walking.
- Para transit services (special transportation services for people with disabilities; some offer door-to-door service).

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Take someone with you. You may want to have a family member or friend go with you when you use public transportation or when you walk. Having someone with you can help you get where you want to go without confusion.

Find out about transportation services in your area. Many community-based volunteer programs offer free or low-cost transportation.

Where Can I Get Help With Transportation?

To find transportation services in your area, visit www.eldercare.gov or call the national ElderCare Locator at **800-677-1116**, and ask for your local Office on Aging.

If you have a disability, check out Easter Seals Project ACTION at www.projectaction.org or call **800-659-6428**. This project works with the transportation industry and the disability community to give people with disabilities more ways to get around.

Where Can I Learn More About Parkinson's Disease?

First, talk with your health care provider. For more information, contact:

- **AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NEUROLOGY:** www.aan.com, 800-879-1960
- **AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION:** www.apdaparkinson.org, 800-223-2723 or 718-981-8001 National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institutes of Health: www.ninds.nih.gov, 800-352-9424
- **PARKINSON'S DISEASE FOUNDATION:** www.pdf.org, 800-457-6676
- **THE NATIONAL PARKINSON FOUNDATION:** www.parkinson.org, 800-473-4636
- To order a free copy of *Age Page on Older Drivers*, call the National Institute on Aging at 800-222-2225, or go to www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/older-drivers.
- **NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION:** www.nhtsa.gov, 888-327-4236

**Always Wear Your Seat Belt.
Do Not Use Your Cell Phone While Driving.**