

Driving When You Have Arthritis

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.

Millions of people have arthritis. It causes pain, swelling, and stiffness in your body. If you have arthritis, talk with your family and health care provider about how it can affect your driving.

How Can Arthritis Affect the Way I Drive?

Arthritis can stop you from moving and bending your shoulders, hips, hands, head, and neck. This can limit your ability to:

- Get into and out of your car.
- Hold and turn your steering wheel.
- Turn on your ignition key.
- Fasten your seat belt.
- Move your head quickly and fully.
- Look over your shoulder to check for cars in your blind spot.
- Look left and right at intersections.
- Make turns safely.
- Reverse your car into a parking space.
- Press the clutch pedal.
- Press the brake and accelerator, especially in heavy traffic or driving during rush hours.
- Look for oncoming traffic.

Medicine for arthritis pain can make you sleepy. It may cause you to drift into another traffic lane, which can be dangerous for you and others.

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

As soon as you notice one or more of these warning signs:

- Tell your family or someone you trust.
- See your health care provider.
- Find out about treatments that can help your joint pain, swelling, and stiffness, without making you sleepy.

Driving When You Have Arthritis

What Can I Do When Arthritis Affects My Driving Safety?

It is important to understand how over time arthritis can change 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 arthritis, you may still be able to drive safely. Work closely with your health care provider to manage your symptoms.

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.
- Paratransit services (special transportation services for people with disabilities). Some offer door-to-door service.

Driving When You Have Arthritis

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 Arthritis?

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

- **ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION:** www.arthritis.org, 404-872-7100 (800-283-7800)
- **AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEONS:** www.aaos.org, 847-823-7186 (800-346-2267)
- **NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTHRITIS AND MUSCULOSKELETAL AND SKIN DISEASES:** www.niams.nih.gov, 301-495-4484
- **NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING**, National Institutes of Health: www.nihseniorhealth.gov/alzheimersdiease.toc.html
 - » 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:** 888-327-4236, www.nhtsa.gov

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