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AOTA JOINS LAUNCH OF CARFIT PROGRAM TO INCREASE SAFETY FOR SENIOR DRIVERS

12-Point Evaluation by Occupational Therapists Stresses In-Car Factors Such As Positions for Seat, Steering Wheel, Brakes, and Mirrors

(Bethesda, MD)—The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) has joined with America's leading senior citizen health and safety organizations to create Carfit, the first program designed to ensure that older Americans have properly adjusted their vehicles to prevent death and reduce injury from air bag deployment and other hazards resulting from a car crash. CarFit was created by the American Society on Aging, in collaboration with AAA, AARP, and AOTA after more than 2 years of research and development.

"There is no magic birthday number to ascertain driver safety," said AOTA President Dr. Penelope Moyers, "Each person responds to the aging process differently. The goal of Carfit is to show seniors adjustments that can be made to their individual cars to improve their comfort and safety."

Occupational therapists understand the critical demands of driving and how the ability to move about the community affects the quality of life. These health professionals have the skills to evaluate an individual's overall ability to operate a vehicle safely, and where appropriate, to provide rehabilitation to strengthen skills used in driving. Occupational therapists also have the science-based knowledge to understand progressive conditions and life changes that can affect driving. This perspective helps people maintain their autonomy, independence, and sense of worth.

For more information on how occupational therapists can help older drivers, please point your web browser to - <http://www.aota.org/olderdriver/>.

CarFit includes a 12-point check list to ensure that senior drivers are sitting properly in their own vehicle and that the driver's seat, seat belt, mirrors, steering wheel, head rest, gas/brake pedals, and other controls are positioned properly. Each CarFit evaluation is administered by specially trained volunteers and health professionals such as occupational therapists.

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Each CarFit evaluation takes only 15 minutes, and measures for a proper “fit” based on some of the following criteria:

- Safety belt use
- Steering wheel tilt
- Head restraint setting
- Positioning to air bag
- Line of sight of over steering wheel
- Positioning to gas/brake pedals
- Mirror adjustment
- Operation of parking brake ignition key
- Operation of other vehicle controls

While many driver safety programs are directed toward improving senior safety by addressing the senior’s cognitive abilities and skills, CarFit is the first program that determines a senior’s proper fit in the vehicle.

A trial version of the program was administered last year with more than 300 senior citizens. The results found that 37% of participating seniors had at least one “red flag” issue with the way they were sitting in their car: 10% of seniors did not have the right spacing between their steering wheel and chest; 25% did not have the right line of sight over their steering wheel.

“One of the fundamental tenets of occupational therapy is that participation in life is a vital part of maintaining health and wellness,” added Dr. Moyers. “By increasing car safety for seniors, we can help them stay mobile and independent.”

As part of Older Americans Month, several AAA clubs will unveil CarFit throughout the month of May by offering free car fittings for seniors across the United States. Many occupational therapists will be participating in the events and demonstrating how to adjust seat height, mirror position, proper distance from the steering wheel, and other factors.

See a [list of Carfit events](#) across the country.

The American Occupational Therapy Association, established in 1917, represents more than 35,000 members. AOTA is an active advocate for the profession, and for individuals who can benefit from occupational therapy services.