

Driving and Transportation Alternatives for Older Adults

Community mobility is an important part of well-being; it is central to a person's autonomy, independence, and sense of worth. For some people, some forms of transportation, such as driving, become less safe, and many seniors will need to address the prospect of using alternatives to driving at some point in their lives. If one's access to the community is limited because driving is no longer an option, it can lead to depression or isolation, and diminished wellness. Occupational therapy is recommended to help keep individuals mobile and independent, helping to ensure meaningful participation in the community.

Occupational therapy can optimize and prolong an older driver's ability to drive safely, and ease the transition to other forms of transportation if driving cessation becomes necessary. By identifying strengths as well as physical or cognitive challenges, occupational therapists can evaluate an individual's

overall ability to operate a vehicle safely and recommend assistive devices or behavioral changes to limit risks. Driving cessation is a last resort, and older drivers can often experience a graduated transition from driving to using other forms of transportation.

Occupational therapists are experts in addressing the essential and everyday activities of daily living (ADL). Occupational therapists are trained to analyze the demands of an activity, to assess performance skills, and to identify the appropriate match of demands and skills to achieve optimal outcomes. These therapists are trained to assess cognitive, visual, perceptual, psychosocial, and motor aspects of performance and tailor intervention plans to the individual. Occupational therapists also have the knowledge needed to recognize the impact of medical conditions and the aging process on driving performance.



Following a tradition of taking a holistic view of the individual in his or her environment, occupational therapists offer a continuum of services related to community mobility, from evaluation of driving performance, through counseling and support for lifestyle changes, to maintaining independence and quality of life.

Occupational therapists address driver safety and alternative transportation options in a number of ways:

- Occupational therapists identify driving as an instrumental activity of daily living, or IADL. In addition to assessing an individual's ability to engage in IADLs, occupational therapists can also determine if difficulties with vision, perception, cognition, and/or motor performance may affect the ability to drive safely. Those found to have problems may be referred to a driving rehabilitation program.
- Occupational therapists with specialized training in driver rehabilitation may administer comprehensive driving evaluations, which include both a clinical and an on-the-road component. The driving evaluation allows the therapist to make recommendations about strategies, equipment, and training to improve driving safety and overall health and well-being.

Intervention after a clinical driving assessment can include a number of skill-building, behavioral, and adaptive approaches to keeping the individual mobile, including:

- Recommendations for adaptive equipment to compensate for age-related changes and allow continued driving.
- Counseling to establish a graduated driving transition plan.
- Training to enhance and prolong driving independence.



Specially trained occupational therapists can perform on-road driving evaluations.

- Identification of alternative transportation options to optimize community participation. ■

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With good driving skills and safe driving habits, older drivers can continue driving with minimal remediation.

For more information: The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) offers a Web site dedicated to providing the public and health professionals with useful, timely information about older-driver safety and related resources. To learn more, visit AOTA's "Occupational Therapists & Driving" microsite, www.aota.org/olderdriver. The American Occupational Therapy Association is the professional society of occupational therapy, representing nearly 35,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students working in practice, science, education, and research.



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Occupational Therapy: Skills for the Job of Living

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