You put your foot on the pedal and go.

It seems easy, but for many older adults, how you drive changes over time.

Declining or dimming vision, decreased strength and stiff joints, slowed reaction times, and other realities of aging can all take their toll on driving ability.

Here’s something that can help—Occupational therapy!
Occupational therapy helps keep older individuals safely on the road for as long as possible.

Occupational therapists can help older drivers overcome or compensate for some of the physical and cognitive changes that may affect their safety behind the wheel. Occupational therapists assess vision, perception, cognition, and motor performance as they relate to driving. If necessary, they can refer older drivers to a specialist for follow-up services.

Occupational therapists with specialized education in driver rehabilitation can give comprehensive driving evaluations and develop individualized programs to improve driver safety through retraining, exercises, compensation strategies, and adaptive equipment. For individuals who are no longer driving, occupational therapists can help identify alternative transportation and provide training in its use to support continued mobility throughout the community.

Here are some steps all drivers can take today to be safer on the road:

1. Adjust the driver’s seat so that your chest is 10 inches or more from the steering wheel.
2. Adjust your sitting posture by moving the steering wheel, adjusting your seat, or sitting on a cushion to get your eyes at least 3 inches higher than the top of the steering wheel.
3. Always adjust your side-view mirrors to minimize the “blind spot” in the rear of the vehicle.
4. If left turns are a problem, try planning a route with more right turns, and minimize or eliminate left turns.
5. If busy road traffic presents a problem, try planning an outing during quieter times, like the middle of the day on a weekday.
This pamphlet was developed by the American Occupational Therapy Association, representing nearly 40,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students.

Occupational therapy is the health profession that specializes in helping people maximize their independence and participate in activities that give their lives meaning. Occupational therapists work in schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, and other places in every community across America.

For more information on occupational therapy and older drivers, visit our Web site at www.aota.org/olderdriver.

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