

On the road 65Plus

Staying independent and safe





Road safety for 65Plus

This guide has advice and safety tips to help people in our community aged 65 or over make safer choices when driving, riding, walking, using a mobility scooter or catching public transport.

It profiles the changes to our health that can come with age, and how conditions such as vision impairment and dementia can affect our abilities as road users.

Checklists are included to help develop safer driving habits and make better choices when walking and crossing the road.

The guide also explains the NSW older driver licensing system, including information for those who want to transition from full-time driving to other transport options.

Whether you're currently experiencing changes to your mobility or planning for the future, this guide will help you stay independent and safe.

NSW Centre for Road Safety
roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au

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Your health

Whether we drive, ride, walk or use a mobility scooter we need to be aware of changes to our health that could affect our safety when we travel.

While many of us will experience different levels of change, there are common medical conditions that are part of the ageing process. Some result in the loss of vision and hearing, decreased perception and memory, or reduced strength, flexibility and movement. Many of us will increase our use of medications as well.

As our health changes we face increased frailty, which significantly reduces our ability to survive a crash. NSW road crash data shows that people aged 75 years or over are three times more likely to be killed in a crash than people in their twenties. This risk increases for people aged 85 or over, who are at least four times more likely to be killed.

If you've noticed changes in your health, visit your medical practitioner. They can provide specialist advice on how to manage any conditions that may affect your safety on the road.

Hearing and vision

Good vision is essential for driving at all times. It is even more important when driving at night, in strong afternoon sun or in low-light conditions.

Common eye conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration can make it difficult to see vehicles, pedestrians, traffic signs and road hazards. Some eye conditions can reduce our side vision, making it difficult to see vehicles or people that are not directly in front of us.

Being able to hear clearly enables us to respond correctly to others on the road and be aware of warning signals such as horns, emergency vehicle sirens and the reversing signals of other vehicles.

Problem-solving, memory and decision-making

Problem-solving and memory abilities help us process and store information, make decisions and respond appropriately to different situations.

When driving, reduced problem-solving abilities and memory can affect our capacity to monitor the road environment, respond to unexpected situations and make safe decisions.

Strength, flexibility and movement

We need muscular strength, flexibility and movement to turn the steering wheel, look behind us when reversing and move in our seat to use rear-vision mirrors.

Reduced strength, flexibility and movement are signs of increased frailty, which increases our risk of injury in a crash.

Medications

Medications help many people maintain good health and quality of life. However, some prescription and over-the-counter drugs can affect our coordination, mental alertness, mood and behaviour.

When driving, medications can affect our perception of hazards, reduce reaction times and impair decision-making skills. If we take two or more medications together, or combine them with alcohol, our driving abilities can be significantly affected.

If you take prescription or over-the-counter drugs, talk to your pharmacist or doctor for advice on any possible effects on your driving. Always check the labels on medications if you are taking them before driving.

Dementia

Dementia is a condition that gradually disrupts a person's memory, speech, concentration, judgement and ability to plan. There are many types of dementia. The most common is Alzheimer's disease, which makes up about 60 per cent of cases. Although dementia can affect anyone, it is more common in people aged over 65 years.

How dementia affects driving

Driving is a complex task that requires attention, memory, judgement and the ability to plan.

We use all of these skills to judge distances, use roundabouts and intersections, and maintain our position within a lane. We also rely on them to return to familiar places, follow road rules and prevent mistakes when driving.

As dementia advances, these skills decline to the point where a person's ability to drive becomes unsafe. Often the person is not aware of these changes.



What to do after a diagnosis

If you are diagnosed with dementia you are legally required to notify Roads and Maritime Services. Reporting your condition doesn't mean your licence will be immediately affected. Roads and Maritime may request your medical practitioner complete a medical assessment to evaluate your ability to drive safely.

People without a diagnosis

Not all people with dementia will have a formal diagnosis. In the early stages the condition can be difficult to notice as the changes are gradual. However, people with advancing dementia often show changes in their driving ability.

If you, or a family member or friend, notice any changes to your driving ability, it's important to see a medical practitioner. They can help you assess your health and determine if the changes are the result of dementia or another medical condition.

Signs to look out for

- Becoming disoriented or lost while driving in familiar areas
- Forgetting the purpose of the trip
- Losing the car in a familiar car park
- Having difficulty making quick decisions at intersections or busy roads
- Driving through stop or give way signs, or red traffic lights
- Not seeing other vehicles, pedestrians or cyclists
- Having difficulty driving into a carport or garage
- Having slower reaction times
- Difficulty using the brake, accelerator or steering wheel
- Confusing the brake and accelerator pedals.

Planning ahead

Early diagnosis of dementia can make it easier for you, your family or carers to plan ahead for lifestyle changes, including your mobility and transport needs.

One way to plan ahead to maintain your mobility is to consider the transport services in your area. These might include community transport, courtesy buses, taxis and public transport.

You could also investigate the home-delivery services of your local supermarket or pharmacist and use internet banking to reduce your reliance on the car.

Some people might consider relocating to be close to transport, services, family or other support networks.

"I was worried about my Dad who turned 78 this year. He was always a very safe driver but I was beginning to notice that his driving was slipping. He was having trouble making decisions and was often getting lost while driving."

Where to find more information

A 'Dementia and Driving Decision Aid' resource is available to help assess changes to driving abilities and plan for retirement from driving. Download it at smah.uow.edu.au and for more information and resources email dementia-driving@uow.edu.au.

Alzheimer's Australia NSW in partnership with the National Roads and Motorists' Association has produced a guide 'Staying on the move with dementia' for people, families and carers living with dementia. To download the guide visit fightdementia.org.au or mynrma.com.au.

Driver licensing at 75 and 85 years

Depending on your age and the type of vehicle you drive there are different licence requirements. Below are the licensing requirements for Class C drivers and Class R riders.

75Plus

When you reach 75 years of age you are required to have a medical assessment every year to keep your licence. Two months before you turn 75, Roads and Maritime will send you a form to take to your doctor. When the medical assessment is completed, return the form to a Roads and Maritime registry or Service NSW centre before your birthday. Your doctor may also return the form on your behalf.



85Plus

Many drivers opt for a modified licence from 85 years. If you want to continue with your unrestricted licence you must have a yearly medical assessment and pass an on-road driving assessment every two years.

You have two options when taking the on-road driving assessment:

- You can go to a Roads and Maritime testing centre for the assessment with a testing officer up to three times at no charge.
- You can take the assessment from home with an accredited driving instructor and pay a fee, with no limit to the number of times you can be assessed within a two-month period.

The on-road assessment must be completed before you turn 85. Roads and Maritime will send you a letter with more details about the assessment and the option to take a modified licence two months before you turn 85.

Modified licences

Drivers aged 85 years or over have the option to change from an unrestricted licence to a modified licence. This licence requires an annual medical assessment, but not the on-road driving assessment.

A modified licence allows you to drive certain distances within your local area to access the services you need, such as shopping, community activities and medical appointments. If you live in regional NSW, the allowable area will accommodate the distances between the essential services you need to access.

If you would like a modified licence, visit a Roads and Maritime registry or Service NSW centre. For more information, call **13 22 13** or visit **rms.nsw.gov.au**.

“When the fitness to drive medical assessment arrived in the post, I went with Mum to her appointment. The doctor was really helpful and explained all the options available.”

Medical conditions that affect driving

All drivers, regardless of their age, must inform Roads and Maritime if they have any medical conditions that could affect their ability to drive safely.

Reporting your condition does not mean you have to give up your licence. Roads and Maritime will request you visit your doctor to have your fitness to drive assessed. During the appointment, talk to your doctor about your driving needs. You may qualify for a conditional licence that allows you to continue driving if you undergo periodic medical assessments. For more information, call **13 22 13** or visit **rms.nsw.gov.au**.

A guide to older driver licensing

More information about licensing options and requirements for older drivers is available at **rms.nsw.gov.au**.

Giving up your licence

If you no longer need your licence, you can hand it in at any time. For identification, you will be offered a free NSW Photo Card when you return your licence to a Roads and Maritime registry or Service NSW centre. If you don't need the card, simply post your licence to a registry or service centre with a short letter about your decision to stop driving.

If you're worried about someone's driving

If you're concerned about a person who is showing changes in their driving abilities, or know of a person who has not reported a medical condition that affects their ability to drive safely, you can inform Roads and Maritime. Download and complete an unsafe driving report from rms.nsw.gov.au and take it to your nearest registry or service centre.



Safer driving habits

If you notice that the way you drive has changed it can be useful to adopt some safer driving habits to protect you and others on the road.

Ready to drive

Every time you get in a car make sure you're ready to drive. Check your:

- seatbelt
- seat position
- mirrors
- handbrake
- pedal position

The simplest mistakes, such as confusing the brake and accelerator pedals, can lead to serious crashes.

Drive to the conditions » Reduce your speed in bad conditions like rain or fog. This gives you more time to respond to an unexpected event. If the conditions are really bad, it's best to not drive at all. If you're already driving, pull over in a safe place off the road, turn on the hazard lights and wait for the conditions to improve.

Increase your response time » All drivers need to allow a three-second gap when travelling behind another vehicle. If you allow a slightly longer gap you will have more time to respond to other drivers and dangerous situations.

Look for other road users » Before you begin driving, make sure pedestrians and cyclists are away from your vehicle by checking your mirrors, blind spots, sensors and reversing camera.

Drive during the middle of the day » It can be harder to see in the late afternoon sun and at night. If you drive during the middle of the day, you are able to see more clearly and there are fewer cars on the road.

Drive short distances » Plan ahead, so you only drive short distances. Drive to the shopping centres closest to you at the least busy times to avoid high-traffic situations.



Share the driving » If you're planning an outing with family or friends or a long journey, share the driving.

Drive on familiar roads » Before you set out, plan your journey so you drive on familiar roads, and avoid situations you may find difficult such as complex intersections, heavy traffic and high speed roads.

Be well rested » Make sure you have a good night's sleep and feel alert before driving. This is especially important in the morning, at night and in the early afternoon as many people feel tired at these times. If you feel tired, it's best to not drive.

Avoid distractions » Turn off mobile phones before you begin driving and avoid distractions so you can focus on driving.

Avoid driving if you are unwell » When you're not feeling well, your risk of being in a crash increases. Wait until you feel better to drive or see a doctor if you continue to feel unwell.

Driving the safest car

Make sure you drive the safest car possible. Safe cars offer better protection, especially for older drivers and passengers, who are more susceptible to injury in a crash. To keep you and your passengers safe, your vehicle needs safety features that help prevent crashes occurring, and provide the best protection in a crash.

The best safety features to help prevent crashes are electronic stability control and autonomous emergency braking. If you're in a crash, airbags should provide front and side head protection, while seatbelts that tighten automatically when a crash is about to happen can help you avoid serious injury.

New cars

If you're buying a new car, check the vehicle safety ratings on the Australasian New Car Assessment Program website [ancap.com.au](https://www.ancap.com.au). The safest vehicles are awarded five stars.

Used cars

To help you choose the safest used vehicles, review the ratings at [howsafeisyourcar.com.au](https://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au). The safest vehicles are awarded five stars.

"I checked my car's safety rating and was shocked to find it only had two stars. I've been using my car to pick up the grandkids from school. There are lots of new and used cars that I can afford with much better safety ratings."



Detecting changes in your driving

Detecting changes in your own driving abilities can be difficult. These examples include some of the signs and situations that show your ability to drive safely might be changing.

Signs of changes in your driving ability

- Constantly feeling tired when driving
- Finding it difficult to read signs, see in poor light or cope with glare
- Experiencing a number of 'close calls' or near misses, or being involved in a crash
- Friends or family expressing their concerns about your driving
- Nervousness and loss of confidence when behind the wheel
- Reacting to medications and feeling less alert or coordinated
- Finding it difficult to turn your head and see over your shoulder
- Finding it hard to handle difficult driving situations, including:
 - » being surprised by passing cars
 - » braking harder than normal for hazards
 - » going through red lights or stop signs
 - » turning too fast or too slowly
 - » backing into or over objects
 - » running over the kerb
 - » keeping the car centred in a lane
 - » judging when to turn at intersections.

"Dad had a series of near misses. So we got him to see his doctor and talk about it. He got a modified licence and is really happy he can drive for his essential local trips."

Retiring from driving

Making the decision to retire from driving doesn't mean that you will lose your mobility and independence. While there will be some lifestyle changes when you stop driving, if you plan ahead you can minimise any loss of independence and ease the transition.

One way to plan ahead is to incorporate your mobility and transport needs into your general retirement plan. Consider the advantages of moving to an area that has a variety of transport options, with shops, medical and community services and social activities close by.

Planning ahead can provide financial advantages. By replacing some of your travel needs with public transport and taxi trips, you could save money on running your car.

Using public transport more often before you retire from driving is a great way to get used to the services in your local area and save money on longer journeys you'd normally take in the car.

You are eligible for discounted public transport throughout NSW if you hold a NSW Seniors Card, Pensioner Concession Card or a Department of Veterans' Affairs Health Card.

Information to help you to plan your retirement from driving

The following sections of this booklet are designed to help you adjust to changes in your lifestyle and enjoy a good quality of life:

- Walking safely and crossing the road (page 18)
- Mobility scooters (page 20)
- Transport options (page 22)
- Using public transport safely (page 23)

"I didn't realise how stressed I was when I was driving. Public transport makes getting to many places so much easier and it's a lot cheaper than using the car."



Motorcycles

Motorcycles are a popular form of city transport and offer enjoyable recreational riding in the country. However, if you haven't ridden for a while, or you are riding your motorcycle less often, you may face a greater risk of having a crash. Consider refining your riding skills and use these tips to stay safe:

Check your gear » As we age we are more susceptible to injury so always wear full protective gear, including gloves, jacket, boots and the safest helmet you can afford. You can check the safety rating of your helmet at **crash.org.au**.

Be a risk manager » When you ride there are things you can do to better manage your risk:

City riding

As motorcyclists can be difficult to see in traffic, you need to plan ahead to react and respond safely to unexpected situations. Scan for potential hazards to give you more time to react to dangers. Create a buffer between you and any potential hazard to give you more space to plan your reaction and respond safely.

Country riding

Plan recreational rides so that you are familiar with roads and riding conditions. Long winding roads and sharp corners require extra care. To improve your vision and safety, make sure you slow down and approach each corner from the widest point. As you round the corner, keep to the centre of the lane, away from any oncoming traffic.

Warning signs

Pull over and take a break if you experience:

- Running wide on a corner
- Rough gear changes
- Missing a sign
- Daydreaming
- Dry mouth
- Stiff joints

Make the most of your next trip by visiting **ridetolive.com.au** where you will find riding, safety and first aid tips, plus a trip planner of great NSW rides.



Bicycles

Bike riding is a great way to keep healthy and active. Follow these tips to improve your safety when you ride:

Plan your route » Choose your route carefully, avoiding high traffic areas. Ride on quieter streets, bicycle paths or shared paths.

Use hand signals » Give hand signals when changing lanes or turning left or right.

Ride in a predictable manner » When riding, be mindful of other road users, so that they don't have to react suddenly to your movements.

Make yourself visible » Make yourself easier to see by wearing bright, light or reflective clothing.

Always wear your helmet » Always wear an approved bicycle helmet and make sure it's properly fitted and fastened.

Follow the road rules » Make sure you follow the road rules, especially at traffic lights, stop signs and give way signs.

Check that your gear works » Make sure you have working brakes, front and rear lights and a bell.

Avoid riding if you feel unwell » If you are feeling unwell or tired, stop, take a break or don't ride.

Walking safely and crossing the road

Walking can help you maintain and improve your health. Follow these tips to stay safe when you're out and about:

Never assume a driver can see you » When crossing the road, never assume that an approaching driver has seen you or will stop. Their vision may be affected by sunlight, parked cars or poor light.

Make eye contact » Before you step off a kerb make eye contact with the driver so they are aware of you.

Use pedestrian crossings » Use safe places to cross the road such as pedestrian crossings or traffic lights with pedestrian signals. If you can't find a crossing nearby, always look for the safest place to cross, even if you have to walk further down the road.

Wait for vehicles to stop completely » Always make sure that vehicles stop completely before you begin crossing the road. Do this even at traffic lights with green walk signals and at pedestrian crossings.

Use the footpath » Always walk on the footpath when available.

Wear bright colours » To increase your visibility when you're out walking, wear bright colours, especially at dawn or dusk.



Take the shortest route

When crossing the road, take the shortest, most direct route to get the other side. If there is a pedestrian refuge island, use it to safely cross the road in two stages.



Check for turning vehicles » At intersections, always check for turning vehicles before you leave the kerb and while you are crossing the road. Sometimes they may be approaching the intersection from behind you.

Watch out for cyclists » Be aware of cyclists using roads, footpaths or pathways in parks. Don't step off the kerb before checking for cyclists, as they can be more difficult to see than cars. When you're on a shared path, keep to the left side of the pathway to allow room for cyclists to pass.

Consider your mobility » Be mindful of how quickly you move. It may take you longer to get out of the way of vehicles on the road, or those reversing from driveways. It may also take you longer to walk across the road.

Mobility scooters

Mobility scooters are used by less mobile people to assist them get to everyday places, such as the local shops.

When using your mobility scooter always follow the same road rules that apply to pedestrians. This means riding on the footpath, preferably at walking speed, which is 2–3 kilometres per hour. You should also cross the road at safe places, such as traffic lights with pedestrian signals and pedestrian crossings.

NSW road rules

- Mobility scooters must not travel at more than 10 kilometres per hour.
- You don't need a NSW driver licence to operate a mobility scooter.

Safe riding tips

Slow down to turn » Always slow down before turning. If you go too fast around a corner, the scooter's wheels can unbalance and you may fall and be injured.

Be careful riding up or down steep hills » Avoid riding up and down steep hills unless it's necessary. Riding up steep hills can drain the battery. Riding down steep hills can put strain on the brakes. Be careful if you need to turn on a steep hill, as you can topple over easily. If possible, ride to a flat surface before turning.

Make sure you're visible » Use a flag and wear bright coloured clothing when riding your mobility scooter to make sure cars and pedestrians can see you.

Slow down when crossing driveways » Always slow down and look and listen for cars when crossing driveways, as drivers may not have seen you. Remember that mobility scooters are smaller than cars, and when you're seated you can be shorter than pedestrians and harder to see.

Use your baskets or racks » When you need to carry things, always use a basket or rack, not your lap. Balancing anything on your lap can distract you when riding and affect your ability to operate the scooter's controls.



Health and medications

Your ability to use a mobility scooter can be affected by your health and any medications you take. Check with your doctor before riding to make sure you have the ability to safely operate your mobility scooter.

Basic skills you will need

Strength » You need a firm grip to hold the handlebars and steer around tight corners.

Balance » Good balance helps you to stay upright when riding over uneven ground or down a hill.

Coordination » You need to be able to quickly and correctly swap between using the accelerator and brake while steering at the same time.

Good eyesight » You must be able to see properly to avoid crashing into obstacles, people and vehicles.

Perception » The ability to know how fast you're going and judge the distances of objects, people or vehicles can help you avoid a crash.

More information on mobility scooters

For more information on mobility scooters, call the Independent Living Centre NSW on **1300 452 679** or visit **ilcnsw.asn.au**.

Transport options



Whether you've handed in your licence or are thinking about giving up driving, there are other ways to stay mobile and independent.

Public transport

If you have a NSW Seniors Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Department of Veterans' Affairs Health Card, you can apply for a Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card offering unlimited travel throughout the Opal network capped at \$2.50 per day. For information about the Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card, call **13 67 25** or visit **opal.com.au**.

For information about public transport timetables, fares and accessibility call **131 500** or visit **transportnsw.info**.

Taxis

People with limited mobility may be eligible for discounted taxi fare vouchers. These can reduce travel costs by up to 50 per cent. They are provided under the Transport for NSW Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme. For information and to obtain an application form call **1800 623 724** or visit **transport.nsw.gov.au**.

Community transport

Community transport services are available throughout NSW. They provide access to recreation, shopping, medical and government services. For contact details of the service providers in your local area and to check eligibility, visit **transportnsw.info**.

Local bus services

In many regional areas, local clubs and councils provide free or low-cost bus services. To find out more, call your local club or council or check their websites.

"I still have my licence, but most of the time now, I use public transport. I can travel all day for just a few dollars."

Using public transport safely

Use these tips when you travel on buses or trains to have a safe journey:

On buses

- Stand back from the kerb when waiting for a bus.
- Watch your step when you get on and off the bus and make sure you use the handrail.
- Keep hold of a handrail when you're on the bus to avoid falls as the bus starts moving.
- Sit at the front of the bus. Less mobile passengers should use the specifically designated seats, often upholstered in red or marked with a priority seating sign.
- Press the button well before your stop and wait until the bus has completely stopped before getting up from your seat.
- Always get off the bus via the front door.
- Choose buses that are wheelchair accessible, with lower floors and priority seating to make travelling easier. These buses are marked on timetables with an 'a' or a wheelchair accessibility sign.

On trains

- Wait behind the yellow line on the platform and don't cross it until the train stops.
- Use the handrails on either side of the train doors to get on and off.
- Watch the gap between the platform and the train.
- Never try to board the train once the departure whistle has blown, when the door closing alarm starts or when you hear the closing doors announcement.
- Hold on to handrails, handles and seat backs when moving through the train or when travelling standing up.
- If you need help when getting on or off a train, ask the station staff. If you have a disability you can also use the Emergency Help Points on platforms and newer trains to contact train staff.



This symbol identifies transport that is easily accessible.

Where you can go for help



Doctor and medical services

If you're concerned that your health is affecting your driving, visit a medical practitioner. They can help to manage any medical conditions you may have and minimise the effect on your driving abilities.

Your doctor can also refer you to other healthcare professionals, such as occupational therapists and optometrists who can assist you to remain fit to drive.

Ensuring you have regular check-ups with your medical practitioner is also important, even if you're not concerned about your health or driving abilities. Your doctor will know your health status and can assist to identify any changes that could be affecting your driving. Remember, too, that your doctor can assist with other health issues that affect your ability to use the roads safely.

Family and friends

Family and friends can be a source of support, not only for your transport needs, but as a way to become aware of changes to your driving that you may not have noticed. If they express concerns about your driving, it's important to keep an open mind to get the best solution for your circumstances.

If you feel worried that you depend too much on your family for transport, consider setting up a support network of friends, neighbours or club members to help you get around.

Support and information services

The transition from full-time driving can often make us fearful of losing our mobility and independence, but there are many services to help us adjust to the changes in lifestyle. This list includes organisations that can help you with specific needs or provide you with other transport options.

Contacts and services

Alzheimer's Australia

1800 100 500 » fightdementia.org.au

Support and resources for people with dementia, their families and carers.

Carers NSW

1800 242 636 » carersnsw.org.au

Provides information, support and counselling for carers in NSW.

Centre for Road Safety

roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au

Information and resources for staying safe on NSW roads.

Community Transport

transportnsw.info

Search for 'community transport' to find service providers across NSW.

Dementia and Driving Decision Aid

smah.uow.edu.au

Search for 'a decision aid' to find this resource to assess driving for people with dementia.

Independent Living Centre NSW

1300 452 679 » ilcnsw.asn.au

Provides information and advice about mobility scooters and other equipment.

Lifeline

13 11 14 » lifeline.org.au

A national charity providing 24-hour suicide prevention and crisis support services.

My Aged Care

1800 200 422 » myagedcare.gov.au

A general information and referral service for seniors, their families and carers.

NSW Seniors Card

13 77 88 » seniorscard.nsw.gov.au

Provides concessions on NSW Government transport and travel and business discounts.

Seniors Information Service

13 77 88 » seniorsinfo.nsw.gov.au

Provides a range of resources to assist seniors of all ages.

Service NSW

13 77 88 » service.nsw.gov.au

Pay for your licence or vehicle registration and book a licence test.

Opal Card

13 67 25 » opal.com.au

Information on the Gold Senior/Pensioner Opal card.

Roads and Maritime Services

13 22 13 » rms.nsw.gov.au

Provides resources and detailed information on the NSW driver licensing system.

Transport Info

131 500 » transportnsw.info

Fare, timetable and accessibility information on trains, buses, ferries and light rail.

For further inquiries

131 500

transport.nsw.gov.au

Disclaimer

The information in this booklet is intended as a guide only and is subject to change at any time without notice. It does not replace relevant legislation.

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Centre for Road Safety