

Seniors Mobility Information

Freedom to move: Grab your coat and get your hat – we're going out! For many people, a spontaneous outing is the ultimate in "mobility" – the ability to move about freely and to come and go as we please. Seniors hold mobility in high esteem, seeing it as an essential element of personal independence. This feeling, coupled with the ability to stay connected with community, promotes well-being and a good quality of life.

What makes for mobility? Mobility depends on a wide range of factors in two broad categories: personal and environmental. **Personal mobility** requires physical health ability, strength, agility and stamina needed for personal locomotion on foot or cycling, or the alertness, eyesight, hearing and reflexes needed to operate a motor vehicle. Psychological factors also play a role: perceptions of risk related to weather and safety on the streets or after dark, or the desire to be self-sufficient and not depend on others for lifts. Interacting with these personal abilities and skills – sometimes for better, sometimes for worse.

Environmental factors

Housing location determines the distance to shops and services, public transit, and the homes of family and friends and therefore the amount and type of transportation required.

Time of day, weather and traffic conditions influence the desire to go out and comfort or safety in doing so.

The design and layout of streets, sidewalks, pathways, buildings and other infrastructure can facilitate or hamper mobility.

Public transit schedules, routes, stops and waiting facilities affect seniors' perceptions of convenience, comfort and safety.

Vehicle and roadway design and signage influence ease and safety of use.

Older Drivers : According to the latest available figures (1996-2000), about 60% of people over age 65 have a driver's license – a rate that varies from 71% for age's 65-69 to 23% for those over 85. More men than women hold licenses – 77% versus 45% – but this gap will likely narrow as the baby boomers age. However, just 40% of seniors drive three or more times a week.

Despite sensationalized news coverage, there is little evidence that older drivers as a group are unsafe drivers. At the same time, older drivers' capacity to drive safely may be compromised by medical conditions or prescription drug use. Hearing loss, reduced peripheral vision, night vision and depth perception, stiffness or pain that restrict the range of motion, declines in mental acuity, and general frailty can all affect driving safety, especially in combination.

Since seniors are more likely than younger drivers to have these conditions are, they are more likely to see their driving affected.

This is the rationale for retesting seniors who want to retain a driver's license. Provinces and territories differ considerably in their licensing requirements and testing procedures, but all use age as the criterion that triggers re-evaluation. Some jurisdictions impose retesting up to ten years earlier than others. The problem with age-based testing is that chronological age alone does not determine driving ability. It misses unsafe drivers under the age limit and needlessly

requires tests of healthy people over that age. Moreover, medical and social science studies show little data to support the assumption that the effects of age alone adversely affect driving performance. Older drivers are just as diverse as seniors behind the wheel.

About half of Canadians age 65+ drives a motor vehicle. The rate is 60% in rural areas and small towns and 46% in urban centers.

Most seniors use their cars less than three times a week, and distances driven tend to be short (11-17 kilometers per day on average).

Older drivers are involved in fewer accidents than those age 15 to 19, largely because they drive less; in terms of kilometers driven, the rate is about the same.

However, seniors involved in collisions are more likely to die from their injuries. Seniors account for a disproportionate number of injuries and fatalities on Canadian roadways, as drivers, passengers and pedestrians.

Going public: For many seniors, being willing to give up driving depends on the availability of convenient, accessible and cost-effective alternatives. These forms of transportation also meet the mobility needs of those who can't afford to own a car or prefer not to. Older women are particularly vulnerable, as fewer than half of women who are over 65 today have driving experience. Among those who outlive their husbands, many have to curtail their activities or rely on family and friends.

Useful Links

Madd - Mothers Against Drunk Driving: www.madd.ca/

OCCID – Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving: www.occid.org/

Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre
Trauma Program's Office for Injury Prevention – www.partyprogram.com

American Association of Retired Persons: www.aarp.org/

Alcohol Policy Network - www.apolnet.org/

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health -www.camh.net/

Ontario Ministry of Transportation – www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/

Ontario Public Health Association - www.opha.on.ca/

Transport Canada - www.tc.gc.ca/