

Tips for talking to elderly drivers

- » Sit down with the elderly loved one and be willing to listen. "They get more information and you get more information about what actually is happening," said Dr. James Goodwin, director of the University of Texas Medical Branch's Sealy Center on Aging.
- » Help the elderly driver assess whether changes in vision, physical fitness and reflexes may cause safety concerns, both for the driver and for others on the road. Ask the elderly driver's doctor for advice.
- » If emotions are running high, include a calm spouse or friends and your physician when talking to elderly loved ones.
- » Propose an objective assessment, like a driving test. "Then, it's no longer my feelings versus your feelings or what somebody says," Goodwin said.
- » Give it time, if possible. Wait several weeks to make a decision. Continue the discussion in a non-adversarial way.
- » If discussions break down, consider bringing in "moral force," Goodwin said. "The children get together, and they all get on message and they all say the same thing — whether it's the children and the in-laws or the children and the neighbors or siblings — and they all go together in a bunch and say: 'Look, this has to stop. Sorry, we're taking your keys.'"
- » Be ready with alternative transportation so the elderly loved one is not isolated. "If you're an adult child, you'd better be willing to, for example, put together the chauffeuring service that needs to be done, or get the money for the taxis or whatever. It's a big step."

How to help older drivers stay fit mentally and physically:

- » Encourage them to exercise and walk daily, and join at least two groups meeting weekly, Dr. Goodwin advises.



- » Moody Methodist Church has an indoor walking track, 2803 53rd St. in Galveston. Annual fee of \$15 for nonchurch members. For information, check the website at www.moody.org/clc/walking-track or call 409-744-4526.
- » Osher Life Long Learning Institute, University of Texas Medical Branch, offers weekly daytime courses for those 55 and older on topics ranging from migratory birds to the strategy of poker. Exercise classes offered include yoga, functional fitness and water aerobics. Most classes meet in Suite B101, Galveston Island Community Center, 4700 Broadway, in a building that

also includes a walking track. For information, check www.utmb.edu/olli or call 409-763-5604.

- » Abundant Living Conference, a three-day event held annually at Camp Allen Conference and Retreat Center northwest of Houston, addresses mental and physical health, life choices and support for seniors, family members and caregivers. For information, call 936-825-7175.

SOURCES: Federal Highway Administration, NHTSA, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, National Safety Council, and the Texas Department of Public Safety Driver License Division

Details to note

- » Information on older drivers from the U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, released in April of this year, with 2011 data, can be viewed at <http://www.nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811745.pdf>.
- » For a list of information and resources for people around older drivers, check the NHTSA website, www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Older+Drivers, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/Older_Adult_Drivers/adult-drivers_factsheet.html.

Older driver statistics

- » As of July, 2013 in Galveston County, 4,160 driver's licenses had been issued to seniors ages 80-89, and 349 licenses had been issued to seniors ages 90-99. One driver's license was on record for a senior 100 and older in the county.
- » In national statistics gathered in 2009, licensed drivers over the age of 75 made up about 6.5 percent of all drivers. But the older seniors accounted for only 3.3 percent of accidents, the lowest among age categories. Drivers in the 25 to 34 age group accounted for 19.8 percent of accidents.

- » Per mile traveled, fatal crash rates increase starting at age 75 and increase notably after age 80, due largely to increased susceptibility to injury and medical complications among older drivers rather than an increased tendency to get into crashes.
- » All age groups, males had substantially higher death rates than females.

SOURCES: Federal Highway Administration, NHTSA, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, National Safety Council, and the Texas Department of Public Safety Driver License Division