

# ★ ★ ★ ★ Senior Safety & Mobility

## Understanding Older Drivers: An Examination of Medical Conditions, Medication Use, and Travel Behaviors

### FACT SHEET

One in six drivers on U.S. roads today are 65 years of age or older. Though generally a very safe group of motorists, older Americans may be more likely to have a medical condition or use medications that can affect their driving. Moreover, as people age, fragility begins to make crash survival and recovery more difficult. As such, finding ways to keep seniors safe and mobile is among the AAA Foundation's top priorities.

### **New Study: Understanding Older Drivers** (Available [Here](#))

#### **Overview**

- **Objective:** Examine the relationships between medical problems/medication usage and the driving behavior and mobility of older Americans.
- **Methods:** Tabulated and analyzed data from two existing surveys to create a portrait of older driver behavior:
  - 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS)
  - 2011 National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS)

#### **Key Findings – Licensing and Travel Patterns**

- Older drivers are an **active group**:
  - Over 75% of male drivers and 60% of female drivers over age 85 drove five or more days per week; and
  - Among the same group, fewer than 5% of men and 10% of women drove less than once a week.
- **Licensing rates** have increased sharply among older drivers:
  - In the early 1970s, **barely half** of all Americans ages 65 and older had licenses;
  - By 2010, this had increased to almost **84%**.
- Between 1990 and 2009, every measure indicates **increased automobility** of older drivers:
  - Daily travel patterns for drivers 65+ indicate more trips, more miles driven, and more time spent driving in 2009 than 1990.

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Seniors face serious driving safety and mobility issues.

## Key Findings – Medical Conditions and Medication Use

- Older drivers are significantly **more likely to report a medical condition** than younger drivers:
  - Drivers ages 65-69 are twice as likely to report having a medical condition as drivers 24-64.
- **Medication use is very high** among older drivers:
  - Over 90% of older drivers take prescription medications; and
  - Of those who take any medication, over two-thirds take multiple medications.
- **Gender differences are extremely large** in all aspects of medication use, travel behavior, and driving self-regulation among motorists ages 65 and older:
  - Women without a medical condition drive less than men *with* a medical condition;
  - Women drivers who use medications or who have a medical condition are more likely to self-regulate their driving than are comparable men; and
  - Women are more likely to report having a medical condition and using multiple medications.
- Older drivers who report using medications or having a medical condition are **more likely to self-regulate** their driving behavior:
  - Three-quarters of drivers ages 65 and older who have a medical condition report reduced daily travel;
  - Older drivers using medications avoid night driving at double the rate of drivers ages 24-64; and
  - Older drivers using medications drive fewer days each week.
- **Income** appears to play a role in ways that warrant future research:
  - Self-regulatory behavior declines with increasing income among people taking multiple medications or who have a medical condition; and
  - Women drivers ages 65-69 with incomes under \$13,000 were 62% more likely to restrict nighttime driving than women of the same age with incomes over \$70,000.

## Discussion & Additional Information

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This study corroborates numerous findings in older driver research, particularly pertaining to the higher prevalence of medical conditions and medication usage among older drivers, and the active steps many take to limit their driving to favorable conditions. There is also clear evidence that higher-income seniors drive more and self-regulate less, even when they have medical conditions. Understanding the various reasons for this – especially since higher-income seniors would likely be able to afford alternate transportation options in the face of medical concerns – will be important to future research efforts.

For more information on this study and the AAA Foundation's other senior safety research and materials, please visit [AAAFoundation.org](http://AAAFoundation.org). We also offer a free online tool, [Roadwise Rx](#), which allows older drivers and others who may be taking medications to get instant, free, confidential feedback regarding how the side effects and potential drug interactions among their prescription and over-the-counter medicines may impair safe driving. For details, visit [www.roadwiserx.com](http://www.roadwiserx.com).

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*Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a not-for-profit, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization. The AAA Foundation's mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur. This research is used to develop educational materials for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and other road users. Visit [www.AAAFoundation.org](http://www.AAAFoundation.org) for more information.*

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