

## **Predicting Risk**

Telling your partner, parents or other relatives that they shouldn't be driving anymore can be one of the most difficult discussions to have. Driving probably gives them a sense of freedom. It makes them feel like they're in control of their lives and still able to do the things they love.

Unfortunately, as your partner, your parents and /or relatives get older, some of them reach a point when it's no longer safe for them to be behind the wheel. The problem is, when that time comes, they may not realize their skills are fading. Or they suspect but don't want to admit that something they once mastered may be gone for good. So, how do you go about getting them to hand over their keys and give up driving?

First, make sure you're not having a knee-jerk reaction to their age. Just because a person reaches a specific birthday doesn't mean he or she can't be a safe driver. However, according to the AARP there are several warning signs to watch for. These include:

- Dents and scrapes on their cars
- Slower response time
- Medical conditions or medications that may affect their driving ability
- Frequent traffic tickets
- Trouble judging "gaps" in traffic

Think of it as "tough love." Even though you might upset them at first, if you believe a partner or parent is putting themselves and others at risk, it's something you have to do. It's important to let them know how you feel and help them understand why you feel that way.

## **Study shows that Parkinson's disease impairs normal driving skills**

Using a five-year, \$1.6 million grant from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, a team of University of Iowa researchers will study how Parkinson's disease affects driver safety. The team, led by principal investigator Ergun Uc, M.D., assistant professor of neurology in the UI Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine, and co-principal investigator Matthew Rizzo, M.D., UI professor of neurology, engineering and public policy, aims to generate data that will help predict driver safety for individuals with this condition.

Interestingly, the researchers found that the driving problems experienced by patients with Parkinson's were associated more with the patient's level of cognitive and visual impairment than with the severity of the patient's physical symptoms, such as the tremors for which the disease is primarily known. Mental functions--including the ability to think and make decisions, memory and attention--are affected, as are reaction times. Parkinson's disease also can affect psychology, causing depression and anxiety, and can alter sleep rhythms and vision. Clearly, Parkinson's disease can affect the ability to drive, and the effect grows as the disease progresses.

*Ergun Uc, MD University of Iowa, Medscape Medical News 2006. UI Health Care News: Week of April 26, 2004*

## **Talking It Out**

Clearly, asking your partner or parent to stop driving isn't easy. They probably view their car as a symbol of their independence and will be reluctant to give it up. So, when you approach the subject:

**Let them know you care** —This may sound simple but telling them that you love them and that you're doing this for their own protection may go a long way in getting them to accept what's happening.

**Be sensitive to their situation** — Put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine how you'd feel if someone told you that it was no longer safe for you to drive.

**Provide alternatives** —Don't just ask them to stop driving. Give them ideas of how they can use public transportation, car services for the elderly or other methods to still do what they want to do.

**Offer to give them rides** —Maybe they'd like to see their family members more often. Work out a schedule with siblings or other relatives and take turns driving them around for a day. It can help bring you closer and show them how much you care.

**Don't go it alone** — Try to include other family members in the discussion if possible. You'll present a united front and show them that you're serious about the situation.

**Do something good** — Perhaps donating their car to a charity or local church will help them take what they may feel is a negative situation and put a positive spin on it.

*The study was published in the November 28 issue of Neurology. Medscape Medical News*