

Occupational Therapy and Older driver safety

What is Occupational Therapy?

Life is made up of meaningful everyday activities or occupations such as driving a car, gardening, preparing a meal, painting, doing the laundry and playing games. Occupations are part of life; they describe who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Occupations bring meaning to life.

When we can't participate in daily occupations, due to injury, illness, disability or social and environmental circumstances, occupational therapists help find solutions to address the meaningful everyday activities of life. Occupational therapy also helps prevent disability or illness and enhances the way we participate in our communities and lives. Occupational therapy helps us engage in the occupation of living.



Why is older driver safety a hot topic?

Age alone does not determine a person's ability to drive safely; however, it is important to recognize changes in vision, perception, cognition and physical ability that may affect driving. Changes in cognition and perceptions, for example, have been shown to be associated with an increased risk of accidents. Also specific medical conditions, such as diabetes and stroke, can impact driving.

Older adults represent the fastest growing portion of the driving population, with roughly 2.7 million drivers over the age of 65 on Canadian roads today. Older drivers have long been believed to be the safest and most cautious drivers on the road, taken into account their experiences, sheer number of kilometers and driving years behind their safety belts. Regardless of this experience, evidence proves that older drivers have more collisions per kilometers driven than any other group. Older drivers injured in car collisions are slower to recover from injuries or are more likely to die to these injuries.

How do occupational therapists help?

Occupational therapists know that driving represents autonomy and independence, and contributes to quality of life and well-being. Driving allows people to get to where they need and want to go to participate in the daily occupation of life. Occupational therapists have a long history of working on strategies to help drivers reduce injury and promote safe-driving practices to keep this expanding group of drivers actively engaged in their communities. Occupational therapists believe that driving is a privilege but mobility is a right.

What do occupational therapists do?

- Evaluate your driving, develop programs to improve safe driving, or help find alternative transportation
- Ensure your clear line-of-sight over the steering wheel
- Check the space between the front air/bag/steering wheel and the driver's breastbone
- Optimize head rest and seating position
- Adjust and ensure proper seat belt use and fit
- Ensure safe positioning of mirrors to minimize blind spots
- Provide strategies to help people with driving safety and driving retirement
- Recommend adapted equipment to enhance your driving practice

Where do occupational therapists work?

Occupational therapists work with health care and other professionals in a variety of places such as communities, schools, workplaces, hospitals, private practices, residential homes and prisons.

Occupational therapy works!

Linda is 69 years old. She has started to notice difficulties with her vision when driving, especially at night. Linda also feels she has slower responses in driving situations and has less confidence in unfamiliar or busy environments. Last month, Linda's husband had a stroke and can no longer drive, making Linda the main driver in the family. Linda attended a Car Fit Session and learned that she is still a safe driver, but the session helped recognized that there are some situations that are more risky than others. She has decided to avoid situations such as driving in heavy traffic, in bad weather and at night. Linda was able to get behind the wheel with confidence and get back to the occupation of living.

