

# Road Safety for Seniors



Looks like I got that backwards, doesn't it? Everyone "knows" that seniors aren't safe on the road - or, are they? Let's talk about the facts, and challenge those assumptions.

First, some very good news: we're doing better. Studies show that older drivers' crash and injury rates are falling faster than the rates for other age groups. And that isn't because seniors are driving less, because actually, we're driving more often, more kilometres, more successfully.

Now, slow down, don't get ahead of me, your son-in-law may still have a point. Seniors are still having too many crashes, those crashes still mean preventable serious injuries and fatalities and they're still predictable. For instance they happen a lot at intersections, more than for other age groups. There are common factors involved, like there are for other age groups, but some differences as well.

The experts agree that about 90% of all traffic collisions are due to driver error and driver condition. You see it all the time in the traffic reports; too fast, too fast for conditions, impaired, distracted, so forth. People – not just seniors - make mistakes while driving, and drive while not fit for the task.

The senior driver's classic error? Failed to yield the right of way, or looked but didn't see another vehicle and so made an unsafe left turn. What about the senior driver's health

condition? Impairment of physical ability or decision-making, or age-related changes to vision, are also contributing factors to accidents involving seniors. You can tell where this is going.

The rest of the bad news is this; we're more seriously injured in crashes than younger drivers, simply because we're more easily injured as we age. Same crash, but a worse outcome.

Now, back to the good news. Why are we doing better? It turns out that what's working, and what we need to continue to be working on, is this; better health, better cars, and better roads.

Not surprisingly, looking after our health and properly addressing any health issues, especially our vision, saves lives. Newer vehicles with active safety features are increasingly doing the same for seniors, preventing crashes and reducing injuries, and safer, better-designed roads are paying huge dividends on the investments.

Knowledge is power: to learn more and drive safer, consider a Defensive Driving Course or refresher from the Kelowna and District Safety Council.

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