

# Life without a car:

## *Helping seniors adjust*

By Arif Abdulla, BA

**C**urrently, 2.7 million seniors in Canada are licensed to drive. While the majority of these drivers are safe, an unfortunate reality is that driving can become more dangerous as we age. In fact, the 85+ group has the highest reported crash rate.

As we get older, our bodies go through a number of changes, some of which make driving more difficult. Among other changes, we become less sensitive to light, react more slowly, find it more difficult to distinguish between colours, and experience varying levels of hearing loss. Because of these realities of aging, it sometimes becomes necessary to adjust to life without a car.

While the adjustment to not driving can be difficult for the older adult, caregivers can try these four tips to help the older adult handle the transition:

- **Decide together:** Giving up a car will be a lot easier if the individual concerned decides to do so on their own. As a caregiver, it is important to be supportive and to encourage any older adult going through this process to consider all aspects and to make the decision they think is the safest.

Creating an environment where a senior can make this important decision themselves will make the transition much easier. Insisting on the change may only further undermine their independence and will likely do more damage than good.

If you feel someone you know should hang up the keys, have a candid conversation with them and ask them to consider the idea. Communicate that you really want to address the issue before an accident does occur. Ensure that they understand you are focusing

on their safety and the safety of those around them, rather than trying to undermine their independence. Point out any incidents that lead you to believe it may be time to consider other transportation options, but remember, diplomacy is key.

- **Research options:** When bringing up the issue with an aging loved one, be sure to have researched alternative transportation. Coming in prepared with a number of other options can help ease the mind of your loved one and show them that they can still get around. Include options such as taxis, buses, handyDART, or professional transportation packages from home nursing services or other senior care providers.

When providing alternative methods, be sure to include schedules, costs, and telephone numbers. The goal is to make the transition as easy as possible for your loved one. Having them constantly trying to find information will be a turn off. Leave all this information in an easy to access place and in a manner that is easy to understand. Consider taking it one step further and planning their transportation routes to their daily or weekly activities.



• **Make a schedule:** Studies show seniors who give up driving may experience higher levels of reported depression and may even end up in nursing homes faster. Often, when a senior gives up their car, they end up missing out on the things they love to do simply because they don't know how to get there. A transportation schedule will ensure that your aging loved one isn't missing out on their favourite activities simply because they can't drive.

If your aging loved one does decide to give up their car, occasionally check in to make sure they are still getting to their doctor's appointments and other important engagements as well as to their favourite activities. Make sure to develop a transportation schedule catered to their needs and their activities.

It may also make sense to take advantage of drop off programs. For example, instead of going out to pick up medications, have your local pharmacy drop them off. This can reduce the amount of travelling that your loved one has to do and will allow them to focus on a favourite activity instead.

• **Involve family:** In most cases, family must occasionally drive their aging loved one to activities or appointments. Involving more family members can ease the burden on any one person and allow others to spend some quality time with the older adult.

Ensure family treat the "chauffeur experience" not as a chore but as an opportunity. Take advantage of the chance to connect with your aging loved one instead of simply dropping them off and picking them up. Having a positive attitude can make it easier on the driver and will ensure the older adult doesn't feel like a burden.

Giving up a car after many years of driving is never an easy transition. However, if approached in the proper manner, families can minimize stress and ensure their aging loved ones still lead fulfilling and satisfying lives while maintaining their independence. ●

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*Anonymous*

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