



Staying Safe & Capable

A Self-Assessment Guide for Car Drivers

This booklet has been developed in partnership with:



DMCC
Devon Memory
Cafe Consortium



We gratefully acknowledge information gained from DVLA, ROSPA and NHS websites

Welcome

This booklet is to help you reflect on your driving abilities and ensure you continue to drive safely. Taking time to continually assess your fitness to drive is an important step in ensuring the safety of yourself, your passengers and other road users.

Valid for all ages, this becomes more important as we get older.

The solutions may be as simple as.

- Getting a new pair of glasses and doing mobility exercises.
- Reading the latest version of the highway code.
- Choosing to go on a speed awareness course instead of accepting the points on your license. The courses are well run, and many people are surprised by how much they learn.
- Arranging for someone knowledgeable to see you drive. You may be pleasantly surprised by how helpful it is and how much peace of mind a refresher driving session can give.

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Introduction – Staying Safe and Capable

We all have a duty of care, as drivers, to our passengers and all other road users, to drive safely within the law.

Ongoing self-assessment of our abilities as drivers is a vital part of the process to achieve this aim.

Here are some questions to help your thinking.

- Do junctions confuse you?
- Does driving (and other drivers) make you angry?
- Are gaps in the traffic harder to judge?
- Do other drivers hoot at you?
- Does everyone else drive too fast?
- Do vehicles appear to come from nowhere?
- Have you recently had a speeding ticket or an accident?
- Have family or friends expressed concern about your driving?
- Do people find reasons not to drive with you?
- Do your passengers “hit the brakes” before you do?
- Are you limiting your driving? E.g. not at night, in the wet, avoiding motorways or busy town centers?
- Does your car spend much more time parked than being driven?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are not alone.

The fact is that the natural physical changes from normal ageing affect your ability to drive safely.

Fortunately, you can cope with many of these changes by learning about your limits and adjusting your driving.

One day we will all have to stop driving, it is better to do this with good grace before you are involved in a serious accident, and there are transport alternatives available to you.

Vision

Good vision is essential for safe driving, helping you read road signs, judge distances, and react appropriately to hazards. It is also a legal requirement to meet the minimum standard.

Self-Assessment Test:

- Can you read a rear number plate from 20 meters away in good daylight? For example, look along a line of parked cars and try to read the number plate of the 6th vehicle.
- Can you go outside in bright light and see clearly right away?
- Do you struggle to see clearly in low-light conditions or when facing glare?
- Are you confident driving at night?
- Have you noticed difficulty recognising road signs from a distance?
- Do you rely on knowing where you are going and then miss diversion signs?
- Do you experience frequent eye strain or headaches when driving?

Advice & Next Steps:

- Have an eye test at least every two years and before you reapply for your driving license at age 70 and every three years or more frequently if requested by the DVLA. People over 60 can have a free eye test every two years or more frequently if advised by your doctor.
- Ensure your glasses or contact lens prescription is up to date, and that you wear them if needed when driving. If you are required to use eye correction, consider having a spare pair of glasses in your car in case you break or lose your main pair.
- Avoid night driving if glare from headlights is an issue.
- Always keep your glasses and vehicles' headlights, windscreen, windows, mirrors and lights clean, and your vehicle's lights properly adjusted.

Hearing

Good hearing allows you to detect emergency sirens, honking horns, and other important auditory cues while driving.

Self-Assessment Test:

- Do you find it difficult to hear sirens or horns when driving?
- Do passengers need to repeat themselves frequently when speaking to you?
- Have you experienced ringing in your ears or difficulty distinguishing sounds?
- Do you leave the indicators on by mistake?

Advice & Next Steps:

- Have your hearing checked regularly by a professional.
- If you wear hearing aids, ensure they are well-maintained and fitted correctly.
- Minimise background noise in the vehicle, such as loud music.

Reaction Times

Appropriate reaction times help you respond to sudden hazards and maintain full control of your vehicle.

Self Assessment Test

- Are you slow to react to sudden changes, such as a car stopping in front of you?
- Do other cars come out of nowhere or seem to be suddenly overtaking?

Advice & Next Steps:

- Regularly check your mirrors and keep looking around.
- Remember to check for other vehicles at junctions.
- Leave a larger gap between you and the vehicle in front to give you more time to react safely.
- If a traffic queue builds up behind you, pull over when safe to let them pass.

Medication and Health Conditions

Certain medications and health conditions can affect your ability to drive safely. It is an unfortunate reality that many of these affect us more the older we are and can sometimes creep up on us without realising.

Self-Assessment Test:

- Are you taking any medications that may cause drowsiness or dizziness?
- Have you recently changed your medication? You may not immediately link a change in your concentration to a change of dose or modification to your prescription(s).
- Do you experience sudden blackouts, confusion, or dizziness while driving?
- Have you been advised by a doctor to limit or stop driving due to health conditions?

Advice & Next Steps:

- Review your medications with a healthcare provider to ensure they are safe for driving.
- If a medical condition affects your ability to drive, discuss possible adaptations with a doctor.
- Check with your insurance provider about any requirements related to age or health conditions.
- Taking a driving assessment at a Mobility Center may also help. They may be able to give advice on useful adaptations to make your car easier to drive. Search for [drivingmobility.org.uk](https://www.drivingmobility.org.uk)
- Consider alternative transport options if driving becomes unsafe. This may only need to be for a short time if you are adapting to new medication.

Remember: you must inform the DVLA of any changes regarding your medical conditions if they affect your ability to drive.

<https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving>

Concentration & Awareness

Maintaining focus on the road helps prevent accidents and ensures you can react to unexpected situations.

Self-Assessment Test:

- Do you find yourself being distracted when talking with your passenger or when you use your mobile phone in hands free mode?
- Have you ever missed a turn or stop sign because you were not paying full attention?
- Do you feel mentally exhausted after driving?
- Do you find large roundabouts or junctions harder to use?
- Do you find it harder to judge other cars' speed and distance?

Advice & Next Steps:

- Take regular breaks on long journeys to maintain alertness.
- Avoid driving when feeling fatigued or under stress.
- If you experience frequent drowsiness, consult a doctor about potential underlying causes.
- Politely ask your passenger to be quiet for a while so you can concentrate.
- Turn off the radio or music when more concentration is required.
- Do not use your phone when driving as even hands free is very distracting.
- The Highway Code now states that even if you are using your phone only as a Sat Nav, you must not adjust it while driving.

Blue Badge

If you can drive, but struggle to walk at your destination, consider applying for a Blue Badge to help with your parking.

Please go to [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and search for Blue Badge.

Memory Loss

Although driving can feel automatic, especially if you have done it for a long time, it is complicated and memory loss can affect skills like concentration, reaction times and spatial skills which can impact on how safe it is for you to drive.

Self Assessment Test

- Do you feel that your driving and reactions to ensure safety have slowed?
- Do you struggle to understand road signs and directions or are you becoming lost on familiar journeys?
- Have other people, such as your family and friends, started to raise concerns about your driving?
- Have you lost confidence in your ability to drive?
- Do you find it difficult to solve problems during the journey?
- Do you completely forget where you have parked your car in a way that causes you stress, anxiety or a serious problem?

Advice & Next Steps:

- Talk to your GP sooner rather than later. Remember it may still be possible to drive, but only if your Doctor says so and please take professional advice.

Some Cars are Easier to Drive

You may benefit from getting a car that is easier to drive and/or get in and out of. Look for:

- An easy drive, with simple and easy-to-reach controls.
- Easy access such as wider door openings.
- Some cars have a higher ride height for a commanding view of the road without being large vehicles.
- Safety features, for example forward collision warning.
- Suitable space and comfort (space for walking aids?).
- Good visibility and large mirrors.

Stay Safe and Legal on Every Journey

You (the Driver)

- Are you fit and well and not so tired you are unsafe to drive?
- Be cautious of drinking alcohol the night before driving. As we age, alcohol takes longer to leave our bloodstream, so it might be midday before you're legally safe to drive.
- Ensure your driving license is valid and that your photo card is up to date.

Your Car

- Ensure your car is legal, safe, clean and clutter free.
- Do the basic safety checks, tyres, windscreen washer etc.
- Check you have enough fuel for the entire journey.
- Plan your route(s) in advance.

How you drive

Safe and considerate driving inspires confidence in your passengers and other road users. It reduces wear and tear on you and your vehicle and smooth driving can also save fuel.

- Allowing plenty of time for the journey reduces stress on you and your passengers.
- The Highway Code. It is good practice to keep yourself aware of any updates. It can be viewed online, downloaded as a pdf for free and is available for sale in book shops www.gov.uk/browse/driving/highway-code-road-safety. You may also be able to borrow a copy from a library
- Consider a refresher driving session. It is always good to get an update on your skills as we all pick up bad habits over the years and please remember our physical ability to drive will change the older we are.

Volunteer Drivers

Thank you if you are a volunteer driver and if not, please consider offering your services.

Here are some reasons why this might be a good thing for you to consider.

Volunteering is good for you

Volunteers are known to feel healthier and happier. It's good for your mental health, a great way to use your skills and be more involved in your community.

It's a great way to meet people in your local community and drivers say what they like most are:

- It is something positive to do with your spare time.
- Meeting fascinating people with stories to tell.
- Feeling they are giving back to their community.
- Having a reason to get out and about.
- Helping people feel happier and well.

As a driver

- Your mileage expenses are paid.
- You meet like-minded people and feel part of a team.
- Training, information and support is there for you when you need it.
- It's a good way to keep up your driving skills and make great use of your car.

It's flexible, you will always be asked, and you only have to say yes when the times and journeys are OK for you.

Please get in touch via the DAS contact details on the back page to find an opportunity close to you.

Where to find Driver Refresher Training or Assessment

- Many local driving instructors offer refresher sessions.
- ROSPA and the Institute of Advanced Drivers (IAM) may have a driving group local to you. ROSPA has excellent advice online including contacts to find out about Refresher Driver Training - Search for ROSPA Mature Drivers.
- DAS provides driver training to Community Transport Groups.

Alternatives to Driving?

This is not always easy, especially if you live rurally. However.

- Research and practice using buses, trains and taxis before you need to.
- Get yourself a bus pass if you are eligible.
- Can you walk or cycle instead of driving?
- Ask if you can share lifts and offer to contribute to the fuel costs.
- Try Community Transport and Community Car Schemes and enjoy meeting people on the bus or in the car. Please ask us at DAS if you would like information about Community Transport near you in Devon (see back page).

Remember

- Money raised from selling your car, plus the ongoing annual savings on insurance, tax, MOT and servicing can buy a lot of taxi journeys and trips out.

Advantages of not Driving?

People who have given up driving often say that they:

- Wish they had done it sooner.
- Find yourself going out more because someone else is driving, for example at night or in poor weather.
- Enjoy being out more without worrying about driving on the journey home, and they have saved money over the years.

Thank you

With regular self-assessment, you can continue to drive safely. There comes a time, however, when we should stop and there is no shame in this. There are alternatives to driving which may give you more independence and cause less worry for everyone else.

Devon Memory Cafes Consortium

DMCC is a membership organisation which aims to support Memory Cafes across Devon to provide a quality service to people living with dementia and their carers.

Website: dmcc.org.uk

Devon Community Car Forums (DCCF)

DCCF is a membership forum which aims to support Community Car Schemes across Devon who help people, with poor access to transport, get to where they need to be.

Devon Access to Services (DAS)

<https://ndvs.org.uk/devon-access-to-services/>

DAS works to help people access the services they need.

Please see our online resource for Public and Community service providers in Devon. Website: devonservices.org.uk

DAS also supports the work of Community Transport. For more information please go to our website: ndvs.org.uk/devon-access-to-services

dasadmin@ndvs.org.uk

07840 452147 Project Manager (part time)

07542 000027 Project Administrator (part time)

01271 859261 (answer machine)

NDVS (North Devon Voluntary Services)

Suite 206, Queens House, Queens Street, Barnstaple. EX32 8HJ

To the best of our knowledge everything in this booklet was correct at the time of printing. However, it is not legal advice and if you notice anything that is inaccurate, or would be useful to include, please do let us know.

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