

# The safety of elderly drivers

Sociology



The older that a person gets, the more their sight and hearing suffer. Their vision becomes bad and many can become blind or develop cataracts. While many wear glasses or contacts when they are driving, there are still those that are in denial about having problems with their eyesight and insist on driving with their eye troubles. The same thing can be said for their hearing; many elderly people resort to hearing aids, but others do not. When these elderly people are on the road without help for their eyesight or hearing, they become less aware of what is taking place around them (Dugan 127). They have to strain to see what is around them, being unaware of merging cars or changing traffic signals, and they may not hear emergency vehicles or cars honking at them to avoid a potential accident.

Similarly, their reaction times and reflexes are not as quick as when they were younger. Not only are many of them unaware of their surroundings, but when they are aware they are not as quick to react. If a car is merging into their lane, elderly people are slower to get out of the way, often causing a collision (Schaie & Pietrucha 96). They sometimes merge into another lane without noticing another vehicle; if the other vehicle were to honk, the elderly driver might not hear it, and if they do, they might not be able to merge back over in time. Many car accidents are caused by the elderly because of their inability to react quick enough to avoid an accident, such as accidents in which they mistake the gas pedal for the brake and are unable to correct their mistake in time.

With old age comes many health issues, and with these health issues come medications with horrible side effects. Elderly people can experience heart attacks while they are driving, which can cause accidents; many of them are also driving while experiencing certain disorders, such as dementia or

Alzheimer's disease. While these diseases are bad enough, their medications are seldom better. The side effects of many medications can cause a person to fall asleep at the wheel, or the person's body may react to their medication in a way that can cause them to faint while behind the wheel (Cooper 304).

There are many people that agree that elderly people should have road tests undergone before renewing their licenses to ensure that they are still safe to be on the road, but there are also people who feel that this would be a prejudiced act. They believe that everybody should have to take road tests whenever their licenses are up for renewal, as even the driving habits of young adults have changed from when they first obtained their licenses (Thompson 54). Furthermore, the changing health of people is not limited to just the elderly. If the elderly are to be tested to make sure that they are still safe on the roads, so should everyone else.

Many car accidents in the United States can be avoided if the elderly were required to take a road test before renewing their licenses. This will disable certain elderly people from driving if they are not physically or mentally able to drive a car without incident. From the time they take their first driving test until they reach their seventies and eighties, people face many changes in their health, their vision and hearing, and in their reaction times to split-second decisions. To make the roads a safer place, elderly people should be tested to make sure that they can handle all that driving requires.