

Driving cessation hinders aging adults' volunteer and work lives, social lives okay in short term

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For many senior drivers, it is only a matter of time before they are forced to give up their car keys due to failing eyesight or other health issues. Now, University of Missouri researchers have studied how aging adults' driving cessation influences their work and social lives. The researchers found that seniors' loss of driving independence negatively affected their ability to work and their volunteerism; the adults' social lives were not instantly affected yet dwindled over time.

"We found that seniors' productive engagement, such as paid work and formal volunteering, decreased when they stopped driving; however, adults' ability to connect with people in their immediate environments was not immediately compromised by their transitions to non-driver status," said Angela Curl, an assistant professor of [social work](#) at MU and the study's lead author.

Planning for driving [cessation](#) should happen well before [older adults](#) have to give up their car keys, and advance planning can help seniors remain active in society after they quit driving, Curl said.

"Often when individuals stop driving, their health and happiness decline," Curl said. "For seniors, engaging more in their communities is linked to maintained health, lower rates of depression and financial benefits, and this is why adults need to better prepare before they quit driving."

For smoother transitions to non-driver status, Curl suggested older adults think about alternative transportation options early on and include their family members in the conversations.

"Older adults have a tendency to think about driving cessation as something for other people, or they think of quitting driving as so far in the future, that they postpone planning," Curl said. "Finally, when seniors do start thinking about quitting driving, it's too late, and they're panicked and overwhelmed thinking about all the freedoms they will lose."

Many seniors lack appropriate driving alternatives, such as finding rides or using public transportation; yet, Curl found that many older adults will not ask their families for support during this time because they don't want to become burdens. Family members should offer their help to their aging loved ones instead of waiting to be asked, Curl said.

"One way for aging adults to help ease the transition to not driving is to take public transportation once a month as practice before completely losing mobility status or to relocate to a retirement center that provides private transportation to its residents," Curl said.

The Gerontologist published Curl's article, "Giving up the Keys: How Driving Cessation Affects Engagement in Later Life," earlier this year. Other MU researchers, James Stowe, Teresa Cooney and Christine Proulx co-authored the study. The School of Social Work is part of the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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