

# Regular exercise and stretching can help older drivers keep the keys longer

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New research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety finds that increased fatigue and poor physical functioning are leading factors that can result in older adults limiting their driving. But simple steps, like weekly exercise and stretching, can improve safe driving abilities and keep older adults on the road longer.

The AAA Foundation commissioned researchers at Columbia University to evaluate eight domains- depression, anxiety, fatigue, sleep disturbance, pain interference, [physical functioning](#), pain intensity and participation in [social activities](#)—to determine how changes in physical, mental and social health affect driving mobility for [older adults](#). The report found that fatigue and poor physical functioning are most common among older drivers who spend less time behind the wheel.

"Older adults who give up the keys are more likely to suffer from depression than those who remain behind the wheel," said Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "It is important that we find ways to keep older drivers in good physical health in order to extend their mobility."

Research shows that daily exercise and stretching can help [older drivers](#) to improve overall body flexibility and move more freely to observe the road from all angles. Physical strength also helps drivers remain alert to potential hazards on the road and perform essential driving functions, like:

- Braking
- Steering
- Parking
- Looking to the side and rear
- Adjusting the safety belts
- Sitting for long periods of time

"Some decline in [physical fitness](#) is inevitable as we age," said Jake Nelson, AAA director of traffic safety advocacy and research. "But, research shows that exercise doesn't have to be strenuous to produce positive results. You can spread out the time you spend being physically active over the course of your day and week. A few minutes at a time can be sufficient. Simple steps to keep active can keep you driving safely for longer."

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends older adults, who are physically able, get between 2.5 to 5 hours of moderate-intensity exercise each week or between 75 minutes to 2.5 hours of high-intensity physical activity. The exercises should include balance training as well as aerobic and muscle strengthening activities. Older adults should consult their doctor before beginning a new exercise regimen. They should also talk with a healthcare provider about ways to combat fatigue. Prioritizing getting at least seven hours of sleep each night can help older adults stay alert behind the wheel.

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