

# Driving in old age: Why Britons would like more help in deciding when to stop

January 10 2022, by Carol Hawley

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Being able to drive well into old age provides people with invaluable independence, mobility and freedom. Many find that it improves their mental health and social wellbeing too.

The longer we live, however, the frailer we become. Older [drivers](#) may

sustain more severe injuries from road collisions than [younger people](#). As the proportion of aged drivers increases, so does [the risk](#) of driving-related fatalities.

In the UK drivers have to renew their licenses when they turn 70. But it is up to them to declare that they are fit to drive. Unlike many other countries, they do not have to do an eye [test](#) or pass any other health assessment. This system of self-declaration means that a person can pass their test in their teens and then not have their [fitness](#) to drive reassessed unless they are advised to do so, for example, if they have a notifiable medical condition.

[In a recent study](#), we surveyed 3,062 current and ex-drivers in the UK aged between 60 and 100 years (with a mean of 70.4 years) to explore driving habits and attitudes to giving up driving. We found that most people would value their doctor's assessment of their fitness to drive, and whether their medical condition posed any dangers. They also said eye tests and medical examinations should be compulsory.

## Self-certification

In Great Britain, the percentage of adults aged 70 and over who hold a driving license [has steadily risen](#) since the 1970s, from 15% in 1975 to 67% in 2019. The number of [women](#) in their 70s who have a license has increased thirteenfold.

Of the people we surveyed, most (87.1%) were currently driving while 12.9% had given up. Of the ex-drivers, almost two-thirds still held a valid driving license even though they had stopped driving—the license was seen as both a badge of honor and a useful form of identification.

We found that older women are more likely to restrict their driving than men. This is consistent with [previous studies](#). We also found that women

were more likely to believe they had given up driving too early, whereas slightly more men thought they may have left it too late.

[Other studies](#) have also found higher rates of women giving up driving, at every age. [Research suggests](#), however, that more recent cohorts of [older women](#) will have more driving experience than previous cohorts and are likely to continue driving for longer.

Most respondents still at the wheel said they felt confident in their driving and 97% said they intended to continue driving for the foreseeable future. Only 9% had ever considered giving up. However, most said they would if they had a health condition and were advised by a health professional to stop.

## **Road safety**

Most 70-year-olds will make honest declarations when renewing their license. The problem is that some may be unaware of gradual physical, sensory or cognitive changes which could affect their ability to drive safely. This means that some older people may find it difficult to recognize when they are no longer fit to drive and when it is time to stop.

We asked respondents to rate their agreement with a series of possible measures to increase road safety. Almost all agreed that doctors should be required to inform patients if their medical condition may affect their fitness to drive. A vast majority agreed that senior drivers should pass an eyesight test every five years after having their license renewed. And just over half of our respondents agreed that drivers aged around 70 should be required to have a medical examination when renewing their license. Many said that if a DIY kit was available to test their driving fitness, they would use it.

Doctors and optometrists are the most trusted and influential advisers on

fitness to drive for older [people](#), but their role in sharing information and advising on giving up isn't clear. We need to help drivers start to plan for giving up at an earlier stage. As our findings show, many [older drivers](#) would welcome an independent assessment of their ability.

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