

Older adults with newly diagnosed migraine disorder three times more likely to have motor vehicle crash: Study

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A new study from researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus finds that older adult drivers who are recently

diagnosed with migraines are three times as likely to experience a motor vehicle crash. Older adult drivers who reported having ever had migraines in the past were no more likely to have a motor vehicle crash than those without migraines.

Additionally, study results published in the [Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#) explored the relationships medications commonly prescribed for migraine management have with increased crash risk.

"Migraine headaches affect more than 7% of U.S. adults over the age of 60," says Carolyn DiGuseppi, MPH, Ph.D., MD, professor with the Colorado School of Public Health and study lead author. "The US population is aging, which means increasing numbers of older adult drivers could see their driving abilities affected by migraine symptoms previously not experienced. These symptoms include sleepiness, decreased concentration, dizziness, debilitating head pain, and more."

Researchers conducted a five-year [longitudinal study](#) of more than 2,500 active drivers aged 65-79 in five sites across the United States. Participants were categorized as having previously been diagnosed with migraine symptoms (12.5%), having no previous diagnosis but experienced symptoms during the study timeframe (1.3%), or never migraine respondents.

Results indicate those with previous diagnoses did not have a different likelihood of having crashes after baseline, while those with new-onset migraines were three times as likely to experience a crash within one year of diagnosis. However, previously diagnosed drivers experienced more hard-braking events compared to adults who had never experienced a migraine.

Additionally, researchers examined the role medications commonly prescribed for migraines have in motor vehicle events and found that

there was no impact on the relationship between migraines and either crashes or driving habits. However, few participants in the study sample were using acute migraine medications.

"These results have potential implications for the safety of older patients that should be addressed," says DiGuseppi. "Patients with a new [migraine](#) diagnosis would benefit from talking with their clinicians about driving safety, including being extra careful about other risks, such as distracted driving, alcohol, [pain medication](#), and other factors that affect driving."

More information: Carolyn G. DiGuseppi et al, Migraine headaches are associated with motor vehicle crashes and driving habits among older drivers: Prospective cohort study, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.18719](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.18719)

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