

Older drivers who experience falls may be at a higher risk for car crashes

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As we age, our ability to drive may help us live independently, shop for ourselves, and maintain social connections. Although car crash rates are low among older adults and are declining, older adults do still have higher rates of fatal crashes. Falls, which are a common and preventable cause of injury among older adults, may lower our ability to drive safely.

Experts believe that [falls](#) are related to driving in four ways:

- They can cause physical injury that limits mobility (our ability to move) and interferes with driving performance.
- Falling can increase the fear of falling, which leads to a reduction in [physical activity](#) . Reduced physical activity can weaken our physical strength, which also could reduce fitness for driving.
- Falls can affect an older adult's mental well-being, making them more fearful and leading to changes in driving behaviors.
- Falls and difficulty driving may be caused by common factors, such as vision problems.

A research team created a study to see whether falls were related to driving risks and behaviors among [older adults](#). Their study was published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

To test their theory that falls are related to car crashes, crash-related injuries, and changes in driving performance, the researchers reviewed 15 studies of driving behavior among older adults involving nearly 47,000 people.

The researchers learned that older adults who had fallen were 40 percent more likely to experience a car crash after their fall than older adults who had not fallen.

Based on estimates of car crashes involving [older drivers](#) and older adults who fall, falls—or the things that cause falls and crashes—accounted for more than 177,000 additional car crashes each year.

Researchers also learned that falls may be an independent factor impairing an older adult's ability to drive safely, suggesting that some [motor vehicle crashes](#) might be caused by the falls themselves - regardless of the driver's underlying health and functioning.

The researchers suggested that taking steps to reduce the conditions that contribute to both falls and [car crashes](#) could reduce the occurrence of both. Some strategies for doing so include:

- Cataract surgery (a type of eye surgery that helps address cloudy vision)
- Exercise to improve physical and mental well-being
- Efforts to improve mental function

The researchers also suggested that for older adults who fall, post-fall rehabilitation might help improve functional ability and enable them to drive more safely.

More information: Kenneth A. Scott et al, Associations Between Falls and Driving Outcomes in Older Adults: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15047](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.15047)

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