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Ask a psychotherapist

Question: I read with interest your column about senior drivers. My dad is 85 and very with it in many ways. However, I've been feeling less comfortable driving with him lately. What are the warning signs that a senior is losing his or her ability to drive safely?
Answer: You don't say what you have noticed about the change in your father's driving lately although your feeling of discomfort is certainly worth paying attention to. One of the earliest indicators of a change in an older driver's ability is a failure to check the blind spot. Older drivers often become physically stiff and less able to turn their heads around to check their blind spot. They begin to rely only on what they can see in their side mirrors. Often, they express surprise and even anger on realizing that there is someone in their blind spot as they attempt to change lanes. This can be frightening for the older driver, the passengers and the other driver who must quickly take evasive action to prevent a collision.
Newer cars may come equipped with blind spot indicators. It's also possible to purchase a wide angle rear-view mirror to provide a full range of vision on either side of the car. This is a worthwhile purchase for older drivers as well as for anyone whose range of movement is compromised in the neck and shoulder areas.
Unfortunately, for older drivers, this is often only the first of many signs that their driving ability is failing. They may also fail to see stop signs, forget the meaning of various highway signs and even judge badly about when a yellow traffic light is stale (time to stop) or whether they have the right of way at intersections. If you have concerns about your dad's driving, I would urge you to contact the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario to get their free booklet about the perils of senior driving.
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By Alison Kerr, Ph.D.