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Age Spots by Jackie Dover - Freedom of the Open Road

JULY 22ND 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Jackie Dover

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There is nothing like hopping into your car and cruising down the road with your music blasting and the wind in your face. Driving is important to maintaining independence for all ages but especially seniors. Being safe on the road is crucial and everyone needs to take the needed precautions to be the best driver we can be.

The first thing for safety is to ensure you are in the best shape physically, staying active and getting regular check-ups to make sure there are no issue that can arise while we are in control of a vehicle should be mandatory for all drivers. Make sure you understand what medication you are taking and if there are any side effects like drowsiness that could impact alertness on the road. Getting regular vision and hearing checks is important to ensure you are able to make the needed adjustments while driving as quickly as possible.

Plan your route so you are comfortable knowing how to get to where you are going. GPS and navigation aids are great with telling you how to get to unfamiliar places, use the hands free options so you are able to keep both hands on the wheel. Planning a trip so most or all of the driving is done during daylight hours is also a great idea; visibility is better and you have more notice to make required adjustments. In addition, plan enough time that if there is bad weather, you can make other arrangements if needed. Weather conditions such as rain, fog, or snow can significantly affect driving conditions. You may need to slow down and maintain a larger distance from other vehicles. If conditions worsen, consider postponing your trip until weather conditions improve or look into other options such as public transit, ridesharing or arranging rides with friends and family. Being safe is the key.

Keeping your vehicle in good condition is important for all drivers. Maintain regular service and inspections; check tires, lights, brakes and fluid levels on a regular basis. Many newer cars will alert you to any issues and when servicing is required. Having my car tell me when it needs an oil change is super convenient and maybe a little creepy.

A very important rule for driving safety is minimizing distractions. I cannot tell you how many times I see drivers of all ages talking on their phone, head down texting or eating as I try to avoid getting in their way. Limit distractions, use the hands free and voice activated options. Try to avoid adjusting the radio or other controls while moving. Be the example for others.

The discussion on when someone should stop driving will vary for everyone. If there are physical limitations involved such as vision loss or dementia the conversation may come sooner than anyone wishes and some people will be good drivers their entire lives. There are several resources that offer refresher courses or evaluations for older drivers such as AARP, the National Institute on Aging and even your local insurance company. For or more information on this topic or any age related issues, please call Aging Matters 1-800-392-8771, because Aging Matters.

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