

Your Road Ahead

A guide to comprehensive driving evaluations.



Table of contents

Your road ahead.....	2
Who can benefit from a comprehensive driving evaluation?	4
Who can perform a comprehensive driving evaluation?	6
What happens in a comprehensive driving evaluation?	7
What might the occupational therapist tell me?	10
• Continue to drive as you are or resume driving.....	10
• Continue to drive, but with limitations or modifications	11
• You need some rehabilitation or retraining.....	12
• It's time to retire from driving	12
What should I do next?.....	13
How will I know if a certain occupational therapist is right for me?.....	14
What else do I need to know about driving evaluations?	15
If your loved one is in the early stages of dementia – thoughts for you and your family	17
Helpful checklists	
• Questions to ask about driving evaluation programs.....	18
• Finding providers with recommended credentials	19
• Making your car safer for you: Insights from an occupational therapist	20
• Shopping for a new car: Insights from an occupational therapist	21
Resources	22
A note on research methodology.....	22



Your road ahead.

**“Driving means
absolute freedom;
it means independence;
it means self-esteem.”**

– Interviewed driver

Our society is built on the assumption that each of us can get ourselves anywhere at any time.

- **Meet the boys at the coffee shop at 9:00? I'll be there.**
- **Volunteer two afternoons a week at the library? Count on me.**
- **Need a few groceries for dinner? I'll just run to the market.**
- **Work that part-time job I love? I won't miss a minute!**
- **Take a quick trip to visit the grandkids? Can't wait!**

Then – suddenly, it seems – getting where we want to go may not be so easy. A physical setback, a near miss, or a bit of forgetfulness, and we may wonder about our driving skills and safety.

For many of us, the ability to drive is essential to who we are.

Driving is deeply connected to our independence, our enjoyment of life, and our identity as productive, responsible members of society. When we've been driving safely for many years, it's pretty hard to sit still when someone questions our ability to continue.

For the teenager, getting a license and a first set of “wheels” represents a much-longed-for, giant leap into the independent adult world. For many older adults, the possibility of losing that license and car can represent isolation, and occasionally, even depression.

As we grow older, we often hear talk about the need to stop driving, and for some, that need is unquestionable. But we hear almost nothing about the mirror image of that issue: How can we ensure that our driving ability and skills are as good as they should be? How can we know that we've done everything we can to increase the likelihood that we can continue to drive safely?

Increasing age doesn't mean that you have to stop driving. Many older adults make adjustments to when and how they drive in order to compensate for physical and cognitive changes that they experience as they age, and to remain safe behind the wheel and keep others safe. This is a very wise strategy.

And many who experience significant health issues or physical limitations, including fairly severe problems, can sometimes drive safely. Often those who have suffered a medical incident such as a stroke, or who have a chronic medical condition like multiple sclerosis, can stay behind the wheel or even resume driving if they've stopped. **The key is to find out about yourself, and your individual ability to drive safely.** Whether your driving skills are up to par is a very important question – and you don't want to guess at the answer.

How can you find out if you have good driving skills? Have your driving ability evaluated by a professional. This guidebook will describe how you can do that, including:

- Why you can benefit from such an evaluation.
- Who the driving evaluation professionals are.
- What to expect in an evaluation.
- What a driving evaluation professional might be able to do for you.
- The range of recommendations you might receive at the conclusion of your evaluation.

It also includes handy checklists that will make it easy for you to follow up on many of the suggestions included in this guidebook.

About this guidebook – *Your Road Ahead: A guide to comprehensive driving evaluations*

This guidebook was created in partnership with The Hartford's team of gerontologists, the MIT AgeLab and the American Occupational Therapy Association to help older adults, and their family and friends, learn about comprehensive driving evaluations and the benefits they may provide. This guidebook is intended to help those who seek assurance about their ability to continue to drive safely or to resume driving; those who may need some driver retraining or rehabilitation; and those concerned that the time has come to either limit or retire from driving.

Based on original research

We developed this information from research we conducted with two groups of people:

- 1 Occupational therapists who regularly conduct driving evaluations and are certified by either:
 - The American Occupational Therapy Association with Specialty Certification in Driving and Community Mobility (SCDCM), *or*
 - The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists as Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (CDRS).
- 2 Older individuals and caregivers of older adults from across the United States who have participated in driving evaluations.

The quotes that appear throughout this guidebook come directly from those people – older drivers, caregivers and driving rehabilitation specialists – who so kindly shared their experiences and insights into driving evaluations for older adults.

Who can benefit from a comprehensive driving evaluation?

The good news is that most of us can benefit tremendously!

“This is a screening to keep you on the road and to determine your medical fitness and give you information on how you can ... drive longer.”

– Occupational therapist in focus group

A comprehensive driving evaluation is a way to get answers to questions that you, your loved ones or your doctor may have about your ability to continue to drive safely, or to evaluate your readiness to resume driving if you have stopped. For example:

- **If you feel your driving continues to be fine**, you may appreciate having your opinion confirmed by a professional with the background and experience to verify your confidence.
- **If you are “feeling your age”** – not seeing quite as well as you once did, experiencing slowed reaction time or a loss of flexibility – you may benefit from knowing whether or how much these changes may affect your ability to drive safely.

You may also learn new strategies or tips to keep your driving skills sharp.

- **If you have one or more medical conditions** – chronic diseases such as arthritis or diabetic neuropathy, or physical limitations that may lead to a loss of range of motion, flexibility, or strength in your arms or legs – you may also benefit from an evaluation. Moreover, an evaluation may provide you with a plan for rehabilitation, if appropriate.
- **If you have suffered a loss of peripheral vision, depth perception, or other vision-related change**, a driving evaluation would be most helpful.
- **If you have been told that you should stop driving, but you’re not sure that you agree**, you could benefit by getting an opinion from a comprehensive driving evaluator. The evaluation is an extremely thorough process; you will get a recommendation that takes a complete picture of your driving skills and abilities into account. It will include an assessment of your current driving ability and your potential for improvement.



- **If you would like to resume driving after a period of non-driving**, you could benefit from getting a driving “checkup.” For example, if you stopped driving after an illness such as a stroke, an evaluation could show you what effects, if any, the stroke had on your ability to drive safely. It could also point out strategies, rehabilitation therapies, or special equipment that could help you drive safely again. People sometimes find that, after a period of recovery time, some coaching and retraining can help prepare them to get back behind the wheel.
- **If a change of circumstances affects where or how much you drive**, you may benefit from a driving evaluation to sharpen skills and build confidence. Some examples of changes:
 - » You just moved from a city where there was plenty of public transportation to a rural community where there is none.
 - » Your spouse was the primary driver but now you are the primary driver.
 - » Your son or daughter who used to take you wherever you needed to go has moved away.
- **If you have been diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease but are in the early stages**, you may not need to stop driving immediately. A comprehensive evaluation can determine whether you can continue to drive safely for the time being, and can help you make plans for a time in the future when you will not be able to drive. (See page 17 “If your loved one is in the early stages of dementia ...”)

If you can relate to even one of these scenarios, consider how a **comprehensive, high-quality, professional review** of your driving ability could benefit you!

“I wish I had done it a long time ago. A long time.”

– Interviewed driver

Who can perform a comprehensive driving evaluation?

An occupational therapist¹ with specialized training in driving evaluation can perform the evaluation.

While several types of practitioners can rate some aspects of driving ability, an occupational therapist with specialized training in driving evaluation has the credentials to perform a comprehensive evaluation of an individual's driving ability.

These specially-trained occupational therapists are qualified to offer services to evaluate your driving, and to involve the team of professionals required to address your individual needs. They will either work with you to develop a plan to continue driving, or prepare you to transition from driver to passenger when the time comes.

- **They have additional training and expertise in driving rehabilitation** with the credentials required to offer driving evaluations in your state; and most are certified by the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED) or the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).
- **They recognize how aging, overall health, disabilities or risk factors can impact driving.** They understand underlying health conditions, and can help you anticipate future changes and how to compensate for those changes.
- **They can make clinical assessments of vision, cognition, motor performance and reaction time,** and appraise your knowledge of traffic rules. They can also provide a behind-the-wheel evaluation of your driving skills. The evaluation incorporates a holistic approach to driving – from approaching the car, entering and exiting the car, and stowing a walker or groceries, to remembering a route, navigating safe turns, and understanding driving environments.
- **They have the training and expertise to:**
 - » Recommend vehicle modifications and provide driver retraining.
 - » Refer you to other professionals for additional training, such as a licensed driving instructor.
 - » Recommend a certified installer to address your vehicle modification needs.
- **They are qualified to interpret the results of all of your tests.**

¹ The term occupational therapist is used in this guidebook to represent the profession in a way that is familiar to the public. It does not exclude the important role of occupational therapy assistants in older driver rehabilitation.

What happens during a comprehensive driving evaluation?

“... People go to their dentist ... and to their eye doctor periodically, just for a checkup. It doesn't mean they have a problem ... I think it's a good idea to go [to the occupational therapist] for a checkup, just to see whether you have a problem or not ... As [you] age, you get to a certain point [where it's] not a bad idea to ... get a baseline, to get an idea of where you are, and start from there.”

– Occupational therapist in focus group

A comprehensive driving evaluation usually takes two to three hours, and is conducted one-on-one. The evaluation covers a lot of territory and considers how you handle every aspect of driving.

Here's what you can expect:

1. **A clinical evaluation** – which will involve a variety of cognitive, visual and physical assessments.
2. **An on-the-road test** – this should be offered as part of the service you are receiving (if you are not given an on-the-road test during your evaluation, be sure to ask why it was excluded).
3. **Oral feedback and/or a written report** – on the results of your evaluation.

All of these key components should be offered as part of a comprehensive driving evaluation. If you are offered anything less, you can choose to look elsewhere for the service you should expect as an informed consumer.

Comprehensive driving evaluations are a relatively new service. While the three key components (referenced above) are essential, the type of tests within each component may vary slightly. For example, some programs may also use a driving simulator as part of their process. Look for important questions to ask when considering an evaluation service on page 18 of this guidebook.

The clinical evaluation

Your medical and driving history should be reviewed. Your occupational therapist will want to understand how important driving is to you, and most likely will ask:

- What type of driving you do (or plan to do).
- Whether you already limit your driving (for example, to daylight hours, to local roads).
- Whether you drive regularly (such as to work or to a volunteer position).
- If you're the only driver in your home.
- If you have access to alternative transportation, such as a bus, train or subway.

Your comprehensive evaluation should include an assessment of your vision, your cognition (memory, judgment and speed of response), and your motor function (such as strength, range of motion and flexibility).

You can expect to perform some clinical tests that are good indicators of your performance behind the wheel. While some of these tests may seem to be unrelated to driving, they are actually very closely related to skills that are critical to your ability to safely operate a vehicle.

The clinical portion of the exam is important, since a single road test cannot cover every possible situation that a driver might encounter. These tests can provide you with valuable information about your skills as well as your opportunity for learning or improvement in the areas essential to safe driving.

Types of clinical tests you'll likely be given

Vision – In addition to reading the familiar “eye chart,” you may be asked to take tests that evaluate your depth perception, peripheral vision, visual spatial skills, and contrast sensitivity. Why?

- **Depth perception** helps determine a safe following distance and informs decisions related to making a safe left-hand turn.
- **Peripheral vision** affects your ability to be aware of traffic and pedestrians all around you.
- **Visual spatial skills** help you keep your car positioned in the driving lane and park centered between two lines.
- **Contrast sensitivity** is critical to your ability to detect other vehicles or pedestrians, particularly in low light or at dusk.

Cognition – These tests measure your judgment and memory, your ability to follow instructions, and the speed with which your brain reacts. They can help:

- **Assess clinical driving functions**, including determining whether you can focus on several things at once – a skill required for you to drive safely through a very busy intersection where there are a variety of things going on.
- **Predict whether your brain processes information quickly enough** to help you react to an unexpected event – such as a dog running into the street or a car pulling out in front of you – in time to avoid an accident.

Motor function – This assessment covers the most physical parts of driving. It measures your strength, flexibility and endurance for a particular driving task, such as moving from the gas to the brake pedal or looking over your shoulder before you change lanes.

On-the-road test

Depending on the results of your clinical assessment, the evaluator will most likely watch how you do behind the wheel while you're out on the road. The occupational therapist and/or an experienced driving instructor will ride along with you. You will probably be asked to drive an instructor's vehicle that has a passenger side brake for added safety. You'll be rated not just on how you handle the car, but also on your problem-solving ability and judgment, and how well you negotiate the traffic around you. In addition, some evaluations may include a "test drive" in a driving simulator. This helps the occupational therapist understand your reaction time and your response to sudden critical events on the road, without putting you in real danger.

The outcome

Immediately after the testing or at an agreed-upon time in the future, you'll meet with the driving specialist to discuss your clinical results, your driving-related strengths and weaknesses, and any recommendations. The occupational therapist will review your goals and help you develop a plan. Such a plan will likely include suggestions about whether, and under what circumstances, you should continue to drive or start driving again – or whether you need to stop driving.





What might an occupational therapist tell me?

It's natural to feel a little anxious about any evaluation – and that's okay. For many of us the term “evaluation” still conjures up report cards and parent-teacher conferences – not about our children, but about us!

“I’d say go [and have your driving evaluated], and you’ll find out a lot about your driving capacity.”

– Interviewed driver

You can expect the occupational therapist to give you a version, or a combination, of several recommendations:

- **You can continue to drive as you are, or resume driving** if you have stopped. Your driving is fine.
- **You can continue to drive, but with certain limitations**, restrictions, and/or modifications to your car.
- **You need some more time for healing, rehabilitation or retraining** in order to drive safely.
- **The time to stop driving is soon – or may be now.**

Here's additional information on each of those possible recommendations.

Continue to drive as you are or resume driving

This, of course, is what most of us would like to hear. Especially if you had given up driving on your own – as some people do after certain kinds of health-related events – you will be happy to learn that you can, in fact, drive safely. Your occupational therapist will provide guidance and retraining, if necessary, or possibly direct you to another professional for coaching or “lessons” before you get back on the road. This outcome is cause for rejoicing for many people!

Even though you have been told that you can drive safely, be sure to take advantage of the opportunity to learn how you can become an even better driver. Most occupational therapists will provide you with a few driving tips, and since the majority of us have not had any driving instruction since we first got licensed, this is a great opportunity to pick up some new ideas. Your occupational therapist may also evaluate the fit between you and your car, and offer suggestions for making adjustments.

Car manufacturers consistently improve car design, and there may well be safety features in your own car that you are not using, or are using improperly. For example, the occupational therapist can demonstrate how to:

- Adjust your mirrors for maximum benefit.
- Select the best angle for the steering wheel.
- Find the safest position for your seat.
- Properly position your safety belt and head restraint.

This is an opportunity to be sure you're using your car to your greatest advantage!

Keep in mind that as we age we continue to experience changes in many of our abilities. If you experience a change in health or show any signs that your ability to drive safely may be declining, you may want to have your driving re-evaluated.

Many older adults have learned how to stay on the road safely by choosing to drive in a way that's in keeping with their own capabilities – for example, avoiding “high risk” trips on unfamiliar roads or in heavy traffic. Many more readily accept offers of rides from family or friends, or expand their use of public transportation.

Making smart choices about when and where to drive means that you maintain responsibility for yourself – on the road, as well as off.



Continue to drive, but with limitations or modifications

The occupational therapist could suggest that your in-town driving seems fine, but that highway driving, with the control and speed required, is cause for concern. They may:

- **Suggest modifications to some driving habits**, such as avoiding left-hand turns, which are often problematic and one of the principal causes of crashes for drivers of every age.
- **Recommend avoiding higher risk situations or environments when you drive, such as not driving at night** because your night vision, combined with your response speed, is below par. This is a change that many older drivers make on their own.

The evaluation provides you with the evidence to understand why some limitations may be particularly wise choices for you.

“I’m glad they prevented me from being dangerous.”

– Interviewed driver

Car modifications could help

Many people who live with physical disabilities could be helped by having modifications made to their cars – but, unfortunately, these individuals often are unaware of what can be done. There is a variety of equipment that can help you to:

- Enter and exit your car.
- Stow a wheelchair.
- Close the car door.
- Attain a seated position that brings your line of sight at least three inches above the adjusted steering wheel (the recommended clearance).
- Improve your ability to see to the sides and behind you.
- Grasp and turn your key.

Your occupational therapist can prescribe the adaptive equipment that would be helpful to you, and teach you how to use it once it's installed by a qualified equipment dealer.

Examples of adaptive equipment include steering devices, hand-controlled gas and brake adjustments, and mirrors that increase your field of view.

Examples of adaptive equipment for common physical problems and a brief description of that equipment appear on page 20. While this information is not all-inclusive, it may inform you about an option that you didn't know existed. Your occupational therapist can determine your individual needs and tell you about additional options that might help you.

A car that fits you

It may be that you're at a driving disadvantage because your car simply doesn't fit you! Different vehicles are designed for people of different sizes – and while all cars offer a range of adjustments, it's possible that yours doesn't adjust as much as you need for safe driving.

The size of your car may make it difficult for you to see where you're going when backing up, or it may be uncomfortable to enter or exit because it's too high off the ground, or even too low. While purchasing a different car is certainly an expense, perhaps an unplanned one, consider what the ability to drive safely is worth to you.

See page 21 for more information on how an occupational therapist can help you to be safer in your car, and assist you in knowing what to look for when purchasing a new car.

You need some rehabilitation or retraining

Your tests indicated some problem areas, but they may be correctable. If you did poorly, there's a possibility your difficulties resulted from a

medication you're taking, or a lack of flexibility or strength that might improve with therapy. Your occupational therapist may uncover some potential problems when reviewing your medical history and, if so, will suggest that you discuss the situation with your doctor. You may find that the problem can be corrected. And, following time for treatment or healing, you may want to be evaluated again.

It's time to retire from driving

You probably won't be happy with this outcome, but you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, by retiring from driving, you'll help yourself to be safer and keep others safe. And you'll know that the comprehensive evaluation of your driving skills and abilities means that you didn't come to this decision to stop driving before it was necessary.

Now what? Your occupational therapist should:

- **Work with you (and your family, if you wish) to think through other ways to get where you want to go**, so that your transition to passenger or full-time user of transportation alternatives will have the least possible impact on the things you do. Consider that now may be the time for others to give you a hand, perhaps as you've provided assistance to them for so many years.
- **Help you develop questions to ask when exploring alternative transportation choices**, such as public buses or a local service for older adults and disabled individuals, to ensure that the service is right for you. These services vary from one community to another, and there's no "one size fits all."
- **Be a resource to put you in touch with the transportation options in your area**, so that you can stay on the go.

What should I do next?

Now that you understand a little more about the process, here's how to find a driving evaluation program that's right for you.

- ☐ Talk to your doctor or healthcare practitioner, and ask if they would recommend a comprehensive driving evaluation. Your doctor may want to share their opinion, and could also give you a referral to an occupational therapist.
- ☐ For information on local occupational therapists specializing in driver rehabilitation, contact the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) at:

www.aota.org/olderdriver

or call **1-301-652-6611, option 0**

How will I know if a certain occupational therapist is right for me?

“It made me [feel] safe; it made me confident about driving. I don’t drive in fear that I’m going to do something terrible.”

– Interviewed driver

Before you make an appointment, talk with the occupational therapist. Ask every question that’s on your mind, such as:

- What testing is done and how is it done? (Your evaluation should include a review of all the factors related to normal aging, plus any medical conditions that could affect your ability to drive safely.)
- What experience does the occupational therapist have with driving evaluations?
- Do they have any special training or credentials in driving evaluation?
- What does the evaluation cost?

A checklist of questions to ask when selecting an evaluation program is available on page 18 of this guidebook. This easy-to-use checklist can help you receive the value and services you need, so don’t overlook this step!



What else do I need to know about driving evaluations?

“I had no idea what was going to happen. All I knew was I was going to this therapist, and this therapist was going to tell me what I needed.”

– Interviewed driver

Q. Is this confidential? Will the occupational therapist give the results to anyone but me?

A. It depends. Circumstances and state laws are different. Occupational therapists associated with a hospital may have different reporting requirements from those in private practice. Most occupational therapists will send a written report of your driving evaluation to your physician if the evaluation was conducted under a doctor's order or from a doctor's referral. The only way to be sure how the results will be handled is to ask the occupational therapist as part of your interview and selection process before you make your appointment.

If confidentiality concerning your results is important to you, you may want to select a driving evaluation program based on its reporting requirements. You may choose to have the written report sent to family members so they can fully understand the process as well as the result.

Q. Must I follow the occupational therapist's recommendations?

A. That depends. Your results could be reported to your Department of Motor Vehicles by the occupational therapist or by your doctor. It's up to you to determine potential outcomes before engaging in the evaluation process, and you can do this by asking the occupational therapist what their reporting requirements are.

But consider that even if you are not required to make a recommended change, it will benefit you to follow the advice you've received. You now have excellent information about your ability to drive safely – and ignoring what you've been told could put yourself, your loved ones and everyone you encounter on the road at risk of accident or injury.

Q. What does a comprehensive driving evaluation cost?

A. Most program fees run between \$250 and \$600, but some more complicated testing procedures could cost more.

To be certain of what the entire cost to you would be:

- Ask the occupational therapist the cost of the evaluation.
- Ask about health insurance coverage; in some cases your policy may cover some portions or all of the clinical evaluation.
- If you're a veteran, check to see if you might be entitled to an evaluation through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- Even if you must pay out-of-pocket for an evaluation, there may be a discount available – so don't be afraid to ask!



Q. Will I have to go through this process more than once?

A. That depends on your situation. If you experience major health issues, or become aware that your ability to drive safely is suffering, or are increasingly feeling the effects of the normal aging process, you'll most likely want to be evaluated again.

In addition, if you did not do as well as you had hoped, you might want to be evaluated again – particularly if you've noticed improvement following medication changes or time for further healing. You might want to check into a re-evaluation if you are aware of any factor that could make a difference in your ability to drive safely.

Also, some drivers who use vehicle adaptations may want to return for a follow-up evaluation if their health situation changes. And if physical disabilities are keeping you from driving, you may also want to keep in touch with your therapist in case there are new technologies or medical equipment that might enable you to resume driving. Discuss these questions with the occupational therapist during your post-evaluation conversation.

Additional questions?

You may have more questions about the comprehensive driving evaluation process. The best thing to do is to talk with an occupational therapist who has the special training and expertise to handle this critically important service. To find an occupational therapist near you, consult the American Occupational Therapy Association's website at www.aota.org/olderdriver. There you'll find a directory of comprehensive driving evaluation specialists, shown by state.

**“I would [go through it again]
– and I would recommend that
other people do it.”**

– Interviewed driver

If your loved one is in the early stages of dementia...

Thoughts for you and your family

Unfortunately, if your loved one has Alzheimer's disease or dementia, the day will come when it will no longer be safe for them to drive. In the early stages, however, some people are capable of handling driving responsibilities, generally with agreed-upon limitations and family involvement.

Because dementia affects each person differently, a comprehensive driving evaluation can be an objective indicator of whether your loved one currently is safe to continue driving.

The goal of a driving evaluation with an occupational therapist is to evaluate your loved one's current driving capabilities and to offer education and recommendations looking to the future. It is a good idea for a family member or friend to participate in the discussion with the occupational therapist and to be a source of support for their loved one. The occupational therapist's understanding of your loved one's individual strengths, challenges and transportation needs will be important as your loved one makes the transition from driver to passenger.

In addition, you and your family members may find some help in dealing with the driving issue by reading ***At the Crossroads: Family Conversations about Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & Driving***. To download a PDF, visit www.thehartford.com/resources/mature-market-excellence/publications-on-aging.

“[The evaluation] was very thorough. There were things that I knew were problems, but there were other things that I don't think anybody was aware of.”

– Caregiver of family member with Alzheimer's or dementia

Your Road Ahead: Ensuring your safe driving for a lifetime

If you or your loved ones have had any concern about your driving, consider this: **there is an effective way to determine your ability to continue to drive safely and to help you make changes that will make you a better driver!**

Consider having your driving evaluated. A comprehensive driving evaluation will help you to make the best decisions about your driving, and it is a responsible thing to do – for yourself, for your loved ones, and for your community.

Questions to ask about driving evaluation programs



What makes up the evaluation?

- ☐ Do you collect my driving history information?
My medical history?
- ☐ Is there a clinical testing portion?
- ☐ Can you describe the types of tests that are involved?
- ☐ Is there a test in a driving simulator?
- ☐ Is there an actual on-the-road test?
- ☐ Does everyone take the on-the-road test?
- ☐ Is the on-the-road test done in a car owned by your driving assessment program or are other programs involved?
- ☐ Can the on-the-road test be done in my own car?

Who does the driving evaluation?

- ☐ How long have you been conducting driving evaluations?
- ☐ What are the credentials of the person who would conduct my evaluation? *(Some programs have evaluators from varied backgrounds, and understanding these differences may assist you as you make your decision.)*
- ☐ How many driving evaluations have they done?

How does your program work?

- ☐ How long does the evaluation take?
- ☐ How many visits are needed to complete the evaluation?
- ☐ Can I or should I bring a family member or friend with me?

How much does the evaluation cost?

- ☐ Will the occupational therapist accept my insurance to cover any portion of the evaluation?

Do I need to contact my doctor for a prescription?

Is a written report generated following the driving evaluation?

- ☐ Who gets a copy of the report?
- ☐ Do you send a copy of the report to the DMV?
- ☐ Does a copy of the report go to my doctor?

Finding providers with recommended credentials

Driver rehabilitation specialists

The majority of driver rehabilitation specialists are occupational therapists. In some locations, physical therapists and other allied health professionals have pursued advanced training in this specialty area.

There are educational requirements for specialists to become credentialed to perform driving evaluations. These requirements vary by state. Credentials alone do not ensure expertise in the evaluation of aging drivers facing complex medical conditions that may affect their driving.

The following organizations offer certification and are most closely associated with driver evaluation and rehabilitation:

- **The American Occupational Therapy Association – www.aota.org/olderdriver**
Advanced practitioners demonstrating expertise are awarded the credentials SCDQM, Specialty Certification in Driving and Community Mobility.
- **The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists – www.aded.net**
People passing the certification examination offered by this multi-disciplinary organization are awarded the credentials CDRS, Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist.

Providers for vehicle adaption and modification

State law may require that the driving rehabilitation specialist give a prescription for vehicle modifications. This is always recommended to ensure that the modifications are the most appropriate for the individual and their vehicle. Any vehicle modification should be done by a professional with special expertise in this area. Mobility dealers are best suited to do the modifications prescribed.

Most mobility dealers belong to:

- **The National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) – www.nmeda.com**
NMEDA is an association of mobility dealers, manufacturers and rehabilitation professionals.

The best mobility dealers have the credentials of:

- **The Quality Assurance Program (QAP) – <https://nmeda.org/qap/>**
QAP is the only nationally recognized accreditation program for the adaptive mobility equipment industry.

When looking to purchase vehicle modifications, look for a NMEDA-QAP dealer. Your therapist should be able to suggest mobility dealers in your area.

Making your car safer for you: Insights from an occupational therapist

Through a comprehensive driving evaluation, an occupational therapist can provide guidance on ways to modify your car so it is more comfortable and safer to operate. Some modifications are simple and inexpensive, while others can be expensive and customized for an individual. If you think you may benefit from any equipment or modifications to your vehicle, a comprehensive driving evaluation is a good place to start.

By working with a skilled professional:

- You can learn more about which modifications are right for you.
- You may have the opportunity to “try them out” with your therapist before you make a purchase.
- You can receive clear instructions on how to use any equipment or device that might be required.
- You can get a recommendation for a reputable professional who can install equipment.

Examples of car modifications

There are many choices and solutions for car modifications. The best option for one person may not be appropriate for another. Changes to a vehicle can be costly and could pose risks to yourself and others. That's why it is wise to have car modifications made with guidance from an expert.

Here are examples of potential modifications:

- **Cushions** – If your seat won't adjust enough to give you adequate view above the steering wheel, an occupational therapist will advise you on cushions that maintain a proper seating position. In addition, your car seat, safety belt and air bags are carefully designed to work together to protect you. **Do not use bed pillows or other common household cushions while driving because they could compromise your safety in a crash.**
- **Pedal extenders** – If you have short legs or arthritic changes that affect your height, an occupational therapist can advise you on having pedal extenders professionally installed, and how to look for vehicles with an adjustable pedals option. Improperly installed or make-shift pedal extenders can put your life at risk if they are dislodged when driving. **Always consult a trained professional to install pedal extenders.**
- **Spinner knob** – If you have weakness in one arm or an amputation, an occupational therapist can determine if a spinner knob or other steering wheel adaptation is right for you. A spinner knob can help you to safely turn the steering wheel with one hand. **Consult your therapist before getting this type of modification, since the wrong type of knob – or an improperly installed one – may result in a dangerous situation.**
- **Hand controls** – If you have had sensory changes in your feet or an amputation, an occupational therapist can explore the prospects for you to use adaptive hand controls to operate the gas and brake pedals. Hand controls are relatively common. Many drivers have adjusted to them and drive safely. If the occupational therapist determines you could benefit from hand controls, you will need to have on-the-road training before you go solo. **It is important to have hand controls properly installed and to learn how to use them before getting out on the road.**

Shopping for a new car: Insights from an occupational therapist

Not only can occupational therapists assist you with your fit in your current car, they can also help you look for features as you shop for a new car. There is a wide range of vehicle styles and features available today, and you might find it isn't easy to get the best fit. Your occupational therapist can recommend features to help you select the safest and most comfortable car for you.

Occupational therapists can give you advice on vehicles that:

- Allow the greatest visibility of the environment.
- Are easiest to get in and out of.
- Provide the most comfortable use of the steering wheel, gas and brake.
- Offer you the best safety features in the event of a crash.

Based on your occupational therapist's recommendations, you'll know to:

- Consider the space for entering and exiting, as well as headroom and compartment space while seated.
- Compare the ease in adjusting the seats with manual or power controls.
- Understand how to adjust the steering wheel to a comfortable position.
- Ensure good visibility and steering ease.
- Make sure you have enough storage locations for carrying any needed medical appliance(s) or mobility devices (canes, walkers or scooters).

“I wanted a new car that would suit my new life ... I [showed] my occupational therapists the particular vehicles I was interested in. I wanted their advice. And I actually [bought] the car that was more advisable, from [their] standpoint ... And now, months later, I'm extremely pleased that I chose that car.”

– Interviewed driver

Resources

American Occupational Therapy Association

www.aota.org/olderdriver

AARP Driver Safety Program

www.aarp.org/safedriving

Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

www.aded.net

Eldercare Locator

<https://eldercare.acl.gov/>

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

www.iihs.org

**National Highway Transportation
Safety Administration**

www.nhtsa.gov

MIT AgeLab

<https://agelab.mit.edu/>

A note on research methodology

In 2009 the MIT AgeLab, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and The Hartford's gerontology team interviewed:

- 25 adults who had completed a driver evaluation with an occupational therapist.
- 7 caregivers who have a family member with Alzheimer's disease or dementia and who had completed a driving evaluation with an occupational therapist.

Focus groups were also conducted with occupational therapists who have earned specialist certification, such as:

- The AOTA Community Mobility certification (Specialty Certification in Driving and Community Mobility, SCDCM).
- Or have successfully passed the examination and are Certified Driving Rehabilitation Specialists (CDRS) awarded by the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED).

Through the interviews and focus groups, the research team explored the nature of driving evaluations, as well as individual perspectives on the evaluations and the role of the occupational therapist. Because of the nature of these data, we cannot make claims about the population.

The research team would like to thank all of the drivers, caregivers and occupational therapists who shared their experiences and knowledge with us.

The Hartford's Gerontology Team

The Hartford's team of gerontologists create innovative business solutions for the mature market. They are uniquely positioned to apply their knowledge of aging to develop one-of-a-kind products and services for The Hartford's customers, and specialized training for The Hartford's employees. They conduct original research both independently and in partnership with academic institutions and produce public education programs on safety, mobility, and independence. The Hartford has had this in-house expertise since 1984, guiding The Hartford to unparalleled success in understanding and serving the mature market.

The Hartford/MIT AgeLab Partnership

The Hartford became a founding sponsor of the MIT AgeLab in 1999. The Hartford's team of gerontologists and the MIT AgeLab were committed to producing original research that can influence the quality of life of older adults and their families. Through publications, professional meetings and public education, The Hartford/MIT AgeLab partnership successfully reached millions of people in the United States and around the globe with high quality, meaningful information to guide important decisions about safety, mobility and independence.

The American Occupational Therapy Association

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) advances the quality, availability, use and support of occupational therapy through standard-setting, advocacy, education and research on behalf of its members and the public. The contributions of occupational therapy to health, wellness, productivity and quality of life are widely used, understood and valued by society. Occupational therapists trained in driver rehabilitation provide a key component to the evaluation of older driver safety and rehabilitation. The AOTA Older Driver Safety Web site at www.aota.org/olderdriver is a valuable resource for occupational therapy professionals, other health care providers, consumers and caregivers.

This guide is intended as general information for readers seeking information about comprehensive driving evaluations. It is not intended to be an exhaustive source or to relate to any particular person or driving situation. Readers are advised to consult the necessary professionals to assist them in analyzing their unique situation and to refer to the sources identified in the section entitled "Resources" for additional information. All information and representations herein are as of May 2025.