

Elderly driver in traffic

Population aging

The amount and share of the elderly in contrast to the population is increasing particularly strong, as the baby boomer generation - born after the war - enters retirement age in 2010s. According to estimates, 26% of the population will be over 65 years old by 2030. At present, the comparative figure is 16%.

The number of elderly drivers increases

More and more members of the aging population have a driving license. As one takes into account the amount of driving license holders by age group, relinquishing ones license and mortality rate, it can be estimated that in 2010 there are 300,000 driving license holders over 70; five years later the threshold for 400,000 is crossed. According to driving license statistics of Finnish Vehicle Administration AKE, there were 222,632 drivers of comparative age in 2006.

Driving is safe for healthy seniors

Aging involves slow changes that manifest gradually. Sight, hearing and muscle strength deteriorate and observation, evaluation and reacting are slowed down.

The elderly are usually aware of the changes brought on by age and are therefore cautious drivers. They avoid traffic jams and driving in bad weather conditions; in addition, they use routes that allow them to deploy a suitable driving style.

Conscientious driving performance of healthy senior citizens is safe enough that they deserve the same right to use a car as younger people do.



Crossings are dangerous

For elderly drivers, the most common cause for accident is difficulty in observing other traffic. The most serious accidents occur in crossings. Turning left is the hardest thing to do, because the driver must monitor traffic from all directions.

Elderly drivers are less likely to be involved in drunk driving, veering off the road or rear-end accidents than young drivers.

Safety reducing factors

A senior citizens body is frail. Due to this, already a slight bump in traffic may have serious consequences.

Stroke, progressive memory disorder diseases, Parkinsons disease and brain damage caused by falling down are among the most common diseases that affect the safety of driving in a negative way. Diseases which influence traffic vision such as cataract or retinal

detachment cause sensitivity to bright lighting conditions or make it harder to see when it is dark. With regards to Alzheimers disease, the patient has no experience of sickness, making it more difficult to notice the deterioration of ones driving skills. Driving ability is at a dangerously weak level at least in the phase where the patient needs support from others to cope with everyday functions.

Goal: independent movement

The option to move outside the home independently is an important part of well-being. According to research, elderly people - especially women - living in rural areas, far away from services, are in the weakest position when it comes to unrestricted movement. The situation is very different if the senior citizen still has a driving license and has a car in his/her disposal.

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Elderly drivers get-in-shape courses recap skills

Since traffic and the rules that apply to it keep changing constantly, it is good to recap what you know from time to time.

Liikenneturva arranges Elderly drivers get-in-shape courses which are organised by experienced instructors around the country. In addition, self-study material is available.

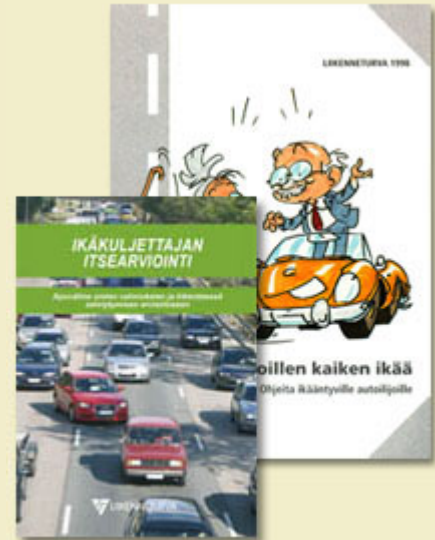
The Anticipatory driving course and Keep your options open course are suited for drivers of all ages and are therefore suitable also for senior drivers.

Number of driving licenses

In 2007, there were 3.5 million driving licenses in Finland. Out of those licenses, 12% were held by people 65 years and older.

age group	number of licenses
65-69	193 142
70-74	117 617
75-79	75 804
80-84	32 957
85-89	8 250
90-94	952
95-	52
total	428 774

There are estimates that in 2030 almost 27% of the licenses will be held by people 65 and older. (OECD, 2001)



Statistical information

During 2000-2004, 18% of deceased passenger car drivers were 65 and older.

The elderly drivers usually get into accidents in intersections. Especially, when turning left or crossing an intersection.

The elderly drivers are less likely than others to be involved in drunk driving accidents, veering off the road cases or rear-end accidents.

Future

The development of the safety situation is hard to predict due to e.g. Cohort Effects:

- people born in different times age differently,
- those born later cope better in traffic than those born earlier,
- share of female drivers is increasing in older age groups.

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The actual level of driving ability needs to be taken into closer scrutiny:

- when a loved one is clearly concerned about the safety of driving,
- when police stops in traffic due to driving problems,
- when several "close call" cases take place in traffic and parking,
- when there are clear difficulties and need for support in remembering everyday things,
- when alertness and concentration vary strongly ,
- when there is stiffness, slowness or uncontrollable motions involved in controlling the vehicle.

Lähde: Raitanen, T.& Kuikka, P. 2004. Iäkkäiden ulkona liikkuminen ja autoilu. Teoksessa T. Raitanen(et al.)(toim.), Geropsykologia: Vanhenemisen ja vanhuuden psykologia. Porvoo:WSOY, 467-475

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