

Facts about Driving and PD

Discussions about driving concerns need to begin after a patient receives a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease (PD). The patient and family should talk at regular intervals due to changes in motor abilities and cognition caused by PD.

We know that, aside from teenagers, older drivers have the highest accident rates. As we age our vision dims, our reactions slow, our joints stiffen, and our memory fades. Patients with PD face additional challenges. The good news is that older drivers are more likely to wear their safety belts, tend to drive when conditions are safest, and are less likely to drink and drive than younger drivers.

Freezing episodes, slowed reaction time, stiffness of the trunk and neck, balance problems, and visual difficulties lead to driving problems. Research shows that those with PD have difficulty turning their heads, moving their feet between the brake and the

accelerator, and steering. Changing lanes, monitoring the blind spot, backing up, and dealing with traffic lights also prove challenging. People with PD tend to drive too slow rather than too fast.

Consider a training program or safety class that focuses upon the special needs of older drivers, or contact a driving rehabilitation specialist who works with patients who have special needs. (See resources listed throughout the Bulletin.)

Participation in community activities is important for us all, but particularly for those with PD. For many of us, driving symbolizes independence, and we need to drive to carry out our daily activities. If you or your family members have concerns about your driving safety, speak with your physician, seek out community resources, and get the help you need.

DRIVING WITH CARE

- ◆ **A right turn is always safer than a left**
- ◆ **Drive the speed limit**
- ◆ **Driving too slow is as dangerous as driving too fast**
- ◆ **Keep enough space, at least 2 car lengths, between your car and the one in front of you**
- ◆ **Check rear view mirror to be aware of the traffic behind you**
- ◆ **Keep headlights clean and aligned**
- ◆ **Check windshield wiper blades and replace when needed**
- ◆ **Keep plenty of gas in the tank**
- ◆ **Keep a cloth/towel in car for cleaning windows**
- ◆ **Be careful at intersections—use turn signals and look *left-right-left***
- ◆ **When changing lanes remember to check rear view mirror, look over your shoulder & signal**
- ◆ **Keep windshields and mirrors clean**

Driving Safety

- ◆ **Adjust driver's seat so your chest is 10" or more from the steering wheel**
- ◆ **Adjust your posture by moving steering wheel or seat or sit on a cushion to get your eyes 3" higher than top of steering wheel**
- ◆ **Adjust side view mirrors to minimize the blind spot**
- ◆ **Wear your seat belt correctly**
- ◆ **Avoid distractions such as listening to radio or having a conversation—this is particularly important for PD patients**
- ◆ **Turn off your cell phone, don't eat or drink, or try to do multiple tasks**
- ◆ **Keep headlights on at all times**
- ◆ **Don't drive when you are stressed or tired**
- ◆ **Be aware of medication effects**
- ◆ **Avoid driving in bad weather such as rain, fog, sleet, etc and during heavy traffic**
- ◆ **Avoid night driving and take familiar roads**