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## **TAKING THE CAR KEYS AWAY**

Seniors, as a group, are relatively safe drivers. Generally, we have fewer accidents as we age. This is attributable to self-imposed limitations that include driving fewer miles, at slower speeds, and avoiding driving at night, during rush hour or on high speed roadways. However, drivers over 75 have a higher risk of being involved in accidents and their rate of fatality is significant, on par with teenage drivers (a sobering thought).

Telling a parent that he or she needs to stop driving is a conversation that most adult children want to avoid. It's difficult to know what to say or, more importantly, how to say it. After all, the implications are significant, particularly in a suburban or rural setting - loss of independence, inability to attend social functions, increased dependency on others, and the fear of becoming a burden. While seniors may subconsciously agree when family members express concern about their driving, and women are, generally, more receptive than men, most report responding with either indignation or depression when asked to relinquish this activity.

If you are thinking that it may be time to have this discussion with a loved one, here are some tips. Be prepared to have more than one conversation. Try to avoid the ultimatum. Private and candid discussion will generally yield better results. Observe the senior at the wheel. A conversation has far more meaning when the senior's driving is experienced first hand. Begin by talking about safety. Use mishaps, self-regulation, or health changes as a lead in. For example, praise a senior for choosing to limit driving to day time, or discuss how new medication may cause drowsiness or a decrease in reaction time. Discuss your concerns with a doctor. A recommendation to stop driving that comes from the doctor usually carries more weight. Be prepared to offer other transportation options. If there is resistance, suggest that the senior's driving skills be tested. Be supportive. Remember, this is more than just the loss of their car, but a clear blow to their freedom and independence. The transition can be difficult.

What if these steps fail to get the desired response? If a high-risk driver refuses to stop driving, the family may have no choice but to sell or disable the car or remove the keys.