

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE
TRANSPORT AND NETWORKS

AM I DRIVING SAFELY? I'M MAKING MATURE DECISIONS!

**HANDBOOK FOR SAFE DRIVING
AT AN OLDER AGE**

S. Vardaki, G. Kanellaidis, G. Yannis



**NATIONAL TECHNICAL
UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS**
Department of
Transportation Planning
and Engineering

Athens, 2010

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Preface

Everyone has the right to safe mobility. Safe travel is essential for activities in every area of our lives, and so for quality of life. Safe driving prevents injury and saves lives; it is an individual right but at the same time a social responsibility. The safe driving handbook "Do I drive safely? I take mature decisions!" is the result of an effort that aims to keep you informed about how you can safely keep driving. The handbook is an initiative from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport and is implemented in the framework of the Strategic Road Safety Plan 2011-2020 being drawn up by the National Technical University of Athens. The Plan, which will be implemented over the coming decade, has the aim of reducing road accidents in Greece. The handbook is based on research carried out in Greece into the attitudes of drivers to safety issues and their driving behaviour. The results of research into the acceptance of the handbook show that you have responded very positively to it. It is encouraging for our initiative that drivers reading it believe that it is useful and that it can lead to discussions with family and friends, during which worries and problems to do with driving can be raised, thus prompting mature and appropriate decisions.

DIMITRIS P. REPPAS

Minister of Infrastructure and Transport

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INTRODUCTION

Every time you drive your car, your vision, hearing and body movements are coordinated. You simultaneously decide how to react to what you see, hear and feel regarding the other vehicles, drivers, pedestrians, road signs, traffic lights, road conditions and the performance of your vehicle. While you are near other vehicles and pedestrians, these decisions have to be processed into actions in order to react with traffic. Within one kilometer, you may have to make around ten to twenty decisions and often you have less than half a second to react in order to avoid a collision.

No matter how complicated driving is, people drive to satisfy their daily requirements, to meet friends and families, to entertain or just to simply go out. But are you in a position to drive safely?

Most older drivers are safe. Nevertheless, the consequences of accidents are more severe for them due to their increased vulnerability. Most of their road accidents occur at junctions, where the demand for understanding traffic conditions, making the right decisions and reacting immediately is greater. The positive thing is that they are involved in fewer accidents caused by speed, alcohol consumption, dangerous overtaking and loss of control. They drive with caution and conservatism.

Nevertheless, changes that come with age affect the ability to drive and may cause driving difficulties for drivers in different ways and to varying degrees. Some older drivers are aware of the limits of their capabilities and cope with their difficulties successfully. When they recognise their weaknesses, they change their driving habits: they drive less and they avoid driving under difficult conditions like the darkness, peak time, wet roads or conditions that cause stress. However, there are drivers who

over-estimate their driving capabilities and do not adjust their driving habits.

In order to make the right driving decisions, you should be aware of the changes in your driving abilities that come with age and which some of you may have already realised -for example changes in your vision- which make it more difficult for you to drive safely. The most common changes due to age are:

- Coordination of movements and reflexes are slower.
- Understanding of dangers and surroundings is reduced.
- Most older people do not see or hear as well as they did when they were younger.
- More time is needed for eyes to recover from the glare of on-coming headlights.
- Information processing becomes slower. Understanding of existing driving conditions, analysing information, making decisions and reaction time is slower, especially in difficult traffic conditions such as at intersections.
- Older people may get tired more easily and become less alerted when they drive long distances.

The purpose of the handbook is to inform you of the changes in your driving ability due to age and about the ways in which you can compensate for these changes. Some of these changes are inevitable and take place so slowly that you may not even realise it. For your own safety as well as for the safety of your friends and family, it is important to be aware of how these changes can affect safe driving and how you can deal with them.

The objective of this handbook is to understand how you can drive safely and what decisions you have to make accordingly. We hope that reading the handbook will help you identify your abilities that have changed and change driving habits as well as the way you make decisions for your driving.

Some information in this handbook is repeated several times. Repetition is useful in order to provide a complete picture of each subject. It is also helpful to refer to the various subheadings should you want to read specific subjects which may interest you. If you don't think that the Handbook is helpful or concerns you today, you could consult it in a later time. At that time, you might find it more useful. The Handbook may also help you deal with family and friends who may be having problems with their driving.

Am I safe in traffic?

Do I have problems at intersections?

Everybody has difficulties with intersections! These are areas where older drivers face most problems. What is your problem? Do you slow down abruptly or react slowly and do so in the wrong instances? Is it difficult to turn the steering-wheel due to your physical health, for example arthritis? Do other vehicles approach faster than expected? Maybe your ability to judge your distance from other vehicles has changed.

One of the most common types of problem faced by older drivers are right-of-way decisions. This is due to the large amount of varying information that needs to be assessed for predicting the movements of other road users and for paying attention to signs, traffic lights and position in traffic. Such driving conditions demand increased attention.

Non-observance of priority yield. You yield priority to other drivers or other drivers yield priority to you. When you doubt about who should yield priority, it is safer for you to do so, even if other drivers should. Furthermore, you should never take for granted that if somebody else comes up to a yield sign, he will follow it.

If you are at an intersection and on your way you approach a yield or a stop sign:

Start slowing down as you approach the sign. Stop in case of a stop sign. Check carefully and yield priority to vehicles and pedestrians on the road that you intersect. After checking the right and left side, continue when the intersection is clear. Wait until you have enough time to go on. If

signs exist on all roads that intersect, priority is given to the driver on the right. If somebody from your left decides to move on, let him proceed.



(P-1)
Yield priority obligatorily.



(P-2)
Stop obligatorily.

Left turns. The most common accidents of older drivers occur during left turns, while the driver crosses the oncoming traffic. Such accidents are usually caused by not obeying traffic signs and traffic lights regarding left turns, incorrect position of the vehicle and incorrect estimation of the speed of the oncoming vehicles. When you are about to take a left turn, you have to slow down in time and use your flash light. If you need to change a lane before turning, then use your flash light and look through your mirrors for any other vehicles behind you and their distance from your car. Leave enough time and space to take the turn and pay attention to pedestrians, motorcyclists, cyclists as well as to other cars that turn and cars coming from the opposite direction.

What helps

- Alter your route so as to pass by signalised intersections (with traffic lights) and avoid the non-signalised, especially for left turns. Traffic lights with green light for left turns are more preferable. Intersections where stop or yield signs exist are more preferable than those without any signs.

- If your daily routes include intersections that make you anxious, it may help you to go there on foot and observe how signs and traffic lights work for drivers and pedestrians.
- Reduced peripheral vision due to age, may lead to mistakes concerning priority. This problem may be partially solved by turning your head more on each side or by moving your head and your eyes right and left several times.
- Avoid intersections and junctions in general, with heavy traffic and at rush hours. If it is possible, follow alternative routes to avoid left turns at complicated junctions or choose routes that include right instead of left turns.
- When you approach an intersection look out for other vehicles and pedestrians that come towards you. You must stop at such a place from where you will be able to check all directions without being in the way of traffic.
- A green light does not always guarantee that it is safe to cross an intersection. Do not enter an intersection even the light is green, unless you are sure it is safe.
- At the intersection, wait until it is safe to continue driving. Even if traffic signs and lights exist, always check your right and left side and then again your right so that you can be sure that you can start driving again. Take your time to check for other vehicles and pedestrians and to estimate how far they are from you.
- When you are waiting for the necessary gap (in between cars) in order to move on safely, estimate the time (or speed) needed to cross the junction. Before starting, check again as vehicles or pedestrians may appear in the meantime.

- Before you start a left turn make sure that you have a clear view of the oncoming traffic. Whenever you do not have a clear view, move on cautiously. It is also important that other drivers can see you.
- Don't assume that another driver who is signaling will finally make the turn.
- Don't assume that a driver who is waiting to turn left will continue to wait. He might misjudge your speed or distance or he may not even notice you.

Do I keep safe distances?

The ability to estimate distances and speed is reduced and reactions become slower with age. For these reasons you must keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you.

In normal traffic conditions, when you are driving behind a vehicle, a distance that can be travelled in at least two seconds should be kept. In case you wish to keep a distance corresponding to three seconds, start counting 1001, 1002, 1003 etc the moment the vehicle passes by a characteristic spot, for example a lighting pole. If you reach this spot before counting 1003, you drive too fast. This rule of thumb applies for every speed and it is easier than estimating distances measured in meters or counting "imaginary" vehicles between your vehicle and the vehicle ahead. If somebody gets in front of you in the gap that you have left, stay back and retain the same distance.

What helps

- It is suggested that you keep a distance corresponding to four seconds when the following conditions exist:
 - At night and with poor lighting conditions.
 - In bad weather conditions like rain and fog.
 - When your vehicle is loaded or when you tow another vehicle.
 - When you are not familiar with the road.
- Keep a safe distance whenever it is possible. If other drivers are pressing you trying to pass and cut in front of you, change lane to be more comfortable in leaving a safe distance in front of you.

Do I pay attention to other road users?

Pedestrians, motorcyclists, bicyclists are vulnerable road users since they are exposed to more traffic related risks. Pedestrians pose a problem as they are often unpredictable and moreover, they need extra time to cross a road. Even if pedestrian crossings exist, someone may try to cross the road when the traffic light is green for you. Others may approach your car from behind. It is also important that you do not block the pedestrian crossing when you stop at the red light. When you turn a corner always watch the path ahead for pedestrians about to enter the street.



(K-15), in Highway Code
Danger due to
a pedestrian crossing.

Children tend to be most unpredictable. When driving near schools (a special sign exists), bus stops, playgrounds or athletic centers you must pay extra attention.



Warning sign for pedestrian crossing used by children in combination with maximum speed limit

Attention must also be paid to motorcyclists and cyclists, especially when opening the door of your car abruptly.

Do I know when I have to yield priority?

For better information and freshening-up what you know about drivers' obligation to yield signs, please consult the Highway Code. It is available at the following web address:

http://www.yme.gr/imagebank/categories/KOK_pdf.pdf.

Even if other drivers approach a yield sign, you must always be cautious and pay attention to drivers who are not focused or not familiar with the area.

Some cases in which you **must yield priority** are presented below:

- ✓ When there is a collision risk, no matter who has to yield priority.
- ✓ When you leave a parking place.

- ✓ When pedestrians cross the road you are in or the one in which you turn into.
- ✓ When you enter or exit adjacent areas and roads.
- ✓ At a yield or at a stop sign.
- ✓ To the vehicles that come from your right when you are at a junction without signs or traffic lights.
- ✓ When you enter a traffic lane or a road where there is traffic.
- ✓ To emergency vehicles, police cars, ambulances, fire brigade vehicles.
- ✓ To the tram at non-signalised intersections.



(K-41), in Highway Code
Danger due to unprotected
intersection with the tram.

Do I always check what happens around me and do I always use the mirrors?

The side mirrors must be adjusted before you start driving so that you can see the sides of your vehicle. In addition, there must be an overlap between the view from the side and rear view mirrors.

Glancing at the rear view and side mirrors regularly allows you to be aware of what happens behind and beside your vehicle. This is very important, especially for overtaking and changing lanes.

However, mirrors don't really show you everything behind and beside you. In order to be able to see a compact vehicle or motorcycle, you must also check blind spots by turning your head to the left or right and quickly looking over your shoulder before changing lane, entering the traffic or turning. A check of the road by turning your head is also essential when you are getting into or out of your car.

Regular use of mirrors is very important for drivers that suffer from hearing problems. Mirrors help to counterbalance the loss of sound information from various sources (for example: an approaching emergency vehicle).

Do I drive too slowly?

Have you noticed if:

- *The other drivers sometimes honk at you or seem to be annoyed by the way you drive in highways?*
- *Drivers on the highway slow down or change lane when you enter it?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

Do you drive too slowly? Generally, traffic conditions, weather conditions and familiarity with the road may affect the way someone drives and can therefore make him drive slower, even lower than the speed limit. Furthermore, someone thinks, makes decisions and reacts slower as he ages. This change may result in slow or reluctant driving and delayed reactions.

When you drive slower than the other vehicles, it is important to know that driving much slower than the maximum speed limit can be dangerous

for the other drivers that do not expect such variation of speeds. If you feel the need to drive slower make sure you are not in the passing lane.

What helps

When you drive slowly:

- Move safely to the right lane as soon as possible.
- Watch and check traffic behind you through the mirrors.
- When followed closely, change lanes to increase headway.

Do I follow safe practices in motorways?

Some drivers face difficulties when driving on motorways, particularly in merging areas, work zones, toll zones, and rest areas. In addition, some drivers express uncertainty when driving at high speeds. On the other hand, evidence indicates that these roads have a relatively safe record. If you have concerns about your driving on motorways discuss them with your doctor. He can give you advice regarding the assessment of your driving abilities or guide you to special driving assessment centers for assistance.

In case that you drive on motorways or high speed roads in general, you are advised to read the next sections.

Am I informed about new traffic rules and signs?

Being aware of the traffic rules and signs may help you, especially if your ability to see signs is reduced. Knowing the pattern of signs (shape, color, content) may help you foresee them. If you are aware of the traffic rules and sign-posting (signs, markings), hesitation and uncertainty are diminished when you need to make decisions quickly.

During the last ten to fifteen years, roads and driving have changed: motorways, which are a relatively new road structure with medians and interchanges have expanded, traffic is generally heavier and traffic congestion has become more frequent and lasts longer.

What helps

- Use the Highway Code or the relative auxiliary material for theoretical training prepared by the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks.

- Ask for informative material about motorways at the toll stations. Information about sign-posting and guidance with reference to driving at intersections that may be helpful when you drive on motorways can be found on the website of Attiki Odos: <http://www.aodos.gr/>.
- Discuss with your doctors any problem you might have (e.g. vision, reflexes, memory) which could affect your safe driving.
- Go to a Driving School for a short re-educational program in order to renew and update your knowledge. Ask for a specialized instructor for senior drivers.

Traffic rules in force on motorways

- ✓ Use the left lane only when overtaking.
- ✓ Avoid sudden changes in speed or direction.
- ✓ It is prohibited to drive on the emergency lane. You may use it in case of emergency, for example if you have a technical problem with your car or in case of an accident. The emergency lane is only for emergency vehicles.
- ✓ When you drive slower than the other vehicles, stay on the right lane.
- ✓ Enter and exit the motorway after carefully checking and with the appropriate speed. (More detailed information can be found in the following paragraphs).
- ✓ New type signs are used (Photos 1 to 4):
 - Informatory signs have a green background.
 - Direction signs are placed above the road pointing out direction for each lane separately (with arrows).

- Signs are placed over the road, pointing out the appropriate lane for each possible way of toll payment.
- Variable message signs provide road safety messages and real time information on traffic conditions.
- Road markings for road works are yellow colored and warning signs for road works have a yellow background.



Motorway sign-posting – photo (1)

- a. Direction sign placed above the road pointing out direction for each lane separately (with arrows), and before an interchange (pointing out the next exit).
- b. Drivers entering the motorway (right side of the photo) must yield priority and are not allowed to make a U-turn.



Motorway sign-posting – photo (2)

- a. Direction signs placed above the road pointing out direction for each lane separately.
- b. Direction sign over the road and markings which point out the exit lane.



Motorway sign-posting – photo (3)

Signs placed above the road (prior to) a toll station pointing out the appropriate lane for each possible way of toll payment.



Motorway sign-posting – photo (4)

Warning sign for road works with a yellow background.

When changing lanes, do I check around me and do I always use my flash light?

Have you noticed if:

- *You do not check all the mirrors and the blind spots when changing lanes?*
- *Vehicles that were in your blind spot appear next to you as you attempted changing lanes?*
- *You are indecisive or slow when changing lanes?*
- *You slow down too much while you are waiting for the appropriate gap in traffic to change lanes?*
- *You have difficulty finding or it takes you too long to decide for the appropriate gap in traffic to change lanes?*
- *You don't always use your flash when changing lanes?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

In order to avoid collision when changing lanes, you must check three areas: the lane you are in, for drivers who may attempt to merge into it, the lane you are going, to be sure you can safely merge there, and the lanes beyond where you are going for other drivers ahead who may intend to enter. Use all the mirrors (the interior and the side ones) and check the blind spot (the area behind and beside the car which we cannot see through the mirrors). Use your flash light early enough before you start changing lanes. In some cases, when changing lanes, you may just forget to check behind or beside you.

What helps

- When you drive in heavy traffic, keep on the right position on the road and use your flash lights so that the other drivers and the pedestrians can understand what you want to do.
- While you are driving, look as far as you can ahead of you and regularly check (but always just for a second) the inside mirror to see what's happening behind you and generally keep checking around you before deciding to change lanes.
- While changing lanes, always check your mirrors and the blind spots. Even if you adjust your mirrors often and correctly, it is still possible that a vehicle might be at the blind spot, a spot where you cannot see through any mirror. That is why it is important to look over your shoulder to the left when changing lanes.
- You must use the flash light every time you change lanes.
- After changing lanes leave sufficient space from the vehicles in front and behind you.
- Use wide-angle mirrors in your vehicle so that you can minimise the number of blind spots. In this case, you must keep in mind that wide-angle mirrors give the impression that the other vehicles are further than they really are.
- Avoid driving on roads with heavy traffic and high speeds.
- Be careful not to get distracted by the radio or conversation.
- Your doctor can suggest ways in improving your flexibility and thus making checking easier.
- If you feel insecure when driving on motorways, try to avoid them.

Do I have difficulty entering the motorway and generally entering traffic?

Have you noticed if:

- *You do not check all the mirrors and the blind spots when changing lanes?*
- *You slow down remarkably while you are waiting for the appropriate gap in traffic to enter the motorway?*
- *You are indecisive or slow when you enter traffic?*
- *You have difficulty finding or it takes you too long to decide for the appropriate gap in traffic to enter the motorway?*
- *It takes you too long to enter the motorway or you enter at the end of the entrance lane?*
- *Drivers on the right lane slow down or change lane when you enter the motorway?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

The Greek road network is continuously being upgraded with the construction of new motorways which are characterised by heavy traffic and high speeds. Many drivers feel nervous and insecure when they enter a motorway with a lot of traffic.

An important issue when you enter traffic -either on a motorway or when the number of lanes have decreased- is being able to see the other vehicles which are behind you on the lane you try to enter. It is important that you enter the motorway with a speed similar to the traffic speed.

In order to drive safely while entering a motorway and generally a highway, check correctly, adjust your speed appropriately and always use your flash light.

What helps

- Avoid reaching the end of the entry lane. Use the length of the entry lane to develop the appropriate speed.
- Do not come to a stop at the end of the entry lane unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Avoid leaving the entry lane and getting into the motorway too early. It is important that you enter the motorway with a speed similar to the traffic speed.
- If you have to slow down while entering the motorway, wait for the appropriate gap in traffic. Don't enter the motorway early and at a low speed.
- If you find it difficult to look in front and behind you simultaneously, wait until the vehicle in front of you merges with traffic before you move, so that you don't get distracted.
- Do not delay checking. Start checking behind and beside you in time.
- Don't delay changing lanes (going from the entry lane to the right lane of the motorway) by driving in both lanes. Change lanes as quickly and safely as possible.
- After entering the motorway try to adjust your speed to the traffic speed.
- Be careful not to get distracted by the radio or conversation.
- If you want to know more about driving on motorways, ask for further information at a Driver's School.

- If you feel insecure or you think that you may get involved in danger, try to avoid motorways.

Do I have difficulty finding the proper exit?

Have you noticed if:

- *You have difficulty finding exits or exit signs?*
- *You cross traffic lanes before exiting?*
- *You stay behind heavy vehicles that block your sight when preparing to exit the motorway?*
- *You brake often, especially before exits, when looking for signs or while reading them?*
- *You get on the right lane or the exit lane very late when you want to exit the motorway?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

While you are exiting a motorway (and a highway in general) it is important that you get on the right lane (which is next to the exit lane) early enough and safely. It is important to retain a speed close to the traffic speed while you are still on the motorway. Check your mirrors and use your flash light before slowing down on the motorway. While exiting, adjust your speed to the posted speed limit.

What helps

- Before departing to an unfamiliar destination, prepare your route using relevant printed material or by asking help from a friend or a member of your family. Before entering the motorway make sure you know which entry and which exit you must use.
- Watch the exit signs. In modern motorways, there are prompt and repetitive warning signs for each exit.
- You may have to change lanes before exiting. Plan your route in time so there is a smaller possibility of missing the right exit.
- If you realise that you are going to miss the exit you want and you cannot change lanes safely, remain calm. Avoid abrupt lane changes. You should never stop or back up on the motorway. Use the next exit.
- Avoid crossing lanes when approaching an exit.
- Keep safe distances from the other vehicles.
- Before departing, find an alternative route to reach your destination in case you miss the exit.

Am I safe in my car?

Do I always use my seat belt?

You must wear your seat belt even when driving short distances. Correctly applied seat belts are the best way to reduce the negative consequences of an accident.

- ✓ Accept the fact that seat belts are necessary and try to convince your fellow-passengers about that. Make sure that everyone who travels with you uses his seat belt.
- ✓ Always remember to apply your seat belt correctly. It should go over your shoulder and in front of your chest.
- ✓ If there are children in your car, remember to set a good example to them. Drive carefully and restrain child according to his age.

Do I keep my car in good condition?

Keeping your car in good condition is important for your safety.

- ✓ Have your car serviced regularly. If you notice anything unusual, have it checked out.
- ✓ Make sure your reservoir is full.
- ✓ Check the pressure in your tyres and their condition regularly.
- ✓ Change your tyres when they are worn or damaged so that they will work safely at all times as well as on wet and slippery conditions.
- ✓ Mirrors, lights and windscreens should always be clear.
- ✓ Read your car owner's manual and follow the recommendations.

- ✓ You can also ask for help when checking your car's condition at your local fuel station.

Do I know what I should do in case of an accident?

Remain calm. Try to think carefully what happened. Drive to the end of the road and stay away as far as you can from traffic. Call Traffic Police and give them all the necessary information. Exchange your personal data, to be used by insurance companies, with the other drivers that are involved in the accident. You should always have the following on hand:

- ✓ Emergency telephone numbers
- ✓ Driving license
- ✓ Your car's identification papers
- ✓ Your insurance contract

Have I noticed any changes in myself?

Do I react slower than previously in emergency situations?

Have you noticed if:

- *Your driving speed is substantially lower than the average traffic speed?*
- *You are indecisive or slow when you change lanes or merge with the traffic?*
- *You slow down too much while you are waiting for the appropriate gap to enter the traffic?*
- *You have difficulty finding or it takes you too long to decide for the appropriate gap in traffic to enter the motorway or change lanes?*
- *You slow down abruptly, stop relatively late or at the wrong place at junctions?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

Emergency and dangerous incidents may rarely occur nevertheless, they demand safe and quick reactions. Most of the older drivers have correct judgment regarding driving. However, some of them react relatively slowly in cases of emergency. This is due to the fact that, at older age, more time is needed to think, make decisions and therefore react. Furthermore, a large amount of information may need to be processed simultaneously.

Many of your abilities need to be at a good level in order to be able to react quickly. You must see or hear the hazard. You must realise that the situation is dangerous and that you need to react accordingly. You must

decide whether your reactions are appropriate and complete it correctly. A small decline in any of these abilities may result in more time needed for reaction in an emergency situation.

What helps

- It is important to look as far as you can ahead of you, both sides of the road, and be aware of what is happening around you but never take your eyes off the road ahead for more than an instant.
- Look out for vehicles that come towards you. Watch out for road users (drivers or pedestrians) not paying attention or vehicles with sudden changes in speed or direction. If you are prepared, you can spot a problem early, you will have more time to deal with it.
- Allow enough following distance from the car in front of you to avoid hitting it no matter how suddenly the driver may stop.
- Even if a traffic light is green from the moment you see it, don't take it for granted that it will still be green when you reach it. Continue driving and be prepared to stop. A green traffic light does not always guarantee that it is safe to pass.
- Keep looking frequently at (but only for one second) the inside mirror to watch what's happening behind you. If another vehicle is close behind you or approaches at high speed, slow down earlier yet avoiding sudden braking. By starting to slow down earlier will prevent the driver behind you from becoming surprised crashing into your car.
- When followed closely, change lanes to increase headway.
- Avoid anything that may distract you: listening to the radio or chatting.
- Schedule your trip in advance.

- If you feel uncertain with high speeds and heavy traffic, avoid them.
- Visit your doctor and ask for his guidance regarding the examination of your ability in processing information and reaction time.
- Sleeping well and resting allows you to concentrate when driving.
- Check your physical condition regularly and ask your doctor for advice if you have serious problems with your mobility.
- Keep yourself in good condition. Do not drive when you drink, are tired, sick or take medication that slow down your alertness on the road.

Do my thoughts wander while I am driving?

Driving is a demanding and complicated process and thus, you must concentrate at all times. Some serious problems of older drivers are caused by the lack of attention and concentration. For example, they do not see stop signs or they violate priority causing road accidents.

Some characteristic examples of distraction that affect driving are when drivers speak on their mobile, glance at newspapers, magazines and advertisements or drink coffee resulting in unsafe driving actions such as pushing the brakes too much or moving out of their lane.

If they need to respond to an unexpected situation, distracted drivers may not be able to react in time to avoid the risk. Fatigue, illness, pain, in turmoil, medication, alcohol consumption, on a full stomach or high volume on the radio may negatively affect your ability to concentrate. Being alert and paying full attention to your driving will give you valuable time to react in an emergency.

What helps

Once again: Remember that driving is complicated. You must always focus when driving.

- Try to identify what prevents you from concentrating and deal with it.
- Get rid of anything that distracts you: listening to the radio or having conversations.
- When possible, drive on roads you are familiar with so that you know where you must use your flash light, which lane you must drive on to turn and where you can easily find a parking place so that you do not get anxious.
- If it is needed for your trip, find the route on a map before embarking on your journey.
- If you need to read a map or written instructions, pull of to a safe place. Keep your glasses in a place where you can easily reach them.
- If there are tolls, keep money in an easily acceptable place.
- Avoid driving if you are sleepy. If going on a longer trip get a good night sleep before travelling. While driving, try to anticipate what those around you might do and what you would do to avoid a crash. This will allow you to be alert and be ready to react in case of emergency.

Is my vision checked frequently?

Have you noticed if:

- *You use your brakes often when you are looking for or while you are reading the signs?*
- *You have difficulty reading signs?*
- *You get surprised by other vehicles that are close behind or beside you when you change lanes or enter a road?*
- *Other vehicles are next to you at intersections or pedestrians come towards you, unexpectedly, when you drive looking forward?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

Vision declines with age. Loss of vision leads to an increased possibility of accident involvement when they are weakened. In this way, it becomes more difficult for driver to read the signs, to pay attention to stopping lights of other vehicles and to correctly estimate the speed and position of other vehicles around him.

Some vision problems cannot be cured but many of them can be treated with the help of your ophthalmologist. In every case, it is important to have your vision checked regularly and to inform your doctor about any changes which may occur.

Glare. As we age, time needed for someone to see clearly after light goes straight to his eyes, increases significantly. This problem is usually shown with the sun glare or from the lights of the oncoming vehicles during the night.

What helps

- Check your vision regularly and inform your doctor about this problem.
- Avoid driving at night
- Avoid looking straight into the lights of the other vehicles on the road.
- Drive on roads with good lighting conditions. The more the available lighting, the less the dazzling from the lights of the other vehicles.

Short and long vision. As we age, the ability to clearly see objects that are close such as printed words or the dashboard, gets weaker. Problems in the short vision may be caused by cataracts which can be successfully treated. Aging may also cause problems in long vision that may increase the accident probability. While driving, this is expressed with difficulty when reading the signs and seeing the road markings. Cataracts may worsen these problems.

What helps

- The use of glasses may help if you experience problems with your short and long vision. It is important to get your eyes regularly examined and to inform your doctor about any changes in your short or long vision.

Peripheral vision. As you age, peripheral vision, which is the ability to see objects at the sides of the object you are looking at, declines. This, can increase the possibility of accidents (for example when priority must be given) since it is harder for the driver to see vehicles and pedestrians on the roadside and to react in time to avoid the risk.

What helps

- Turn your head and your eyes to the right and left several times while driving.
- The problem can be partially reduced at intersections, by turning your head even more.
- Adjust your mirrors to increase the width of your field of vision.
- Use special mirrors to increase the width of your field of vision.
- Use a light and thin frame for your glasses to allow for better vision.

Depth perception. The ability to judge how far away other vehicles are - called depth perception - may decline with age. When driving, this problem is associated with driver's difficulty to estimate the speed without looking at the tachometer, to estimate how quickly he approaches a stopped vehicle, to enter the traffic, to cross the traffic (estimate how quickly other vehicles approach him) and to park his car.

What helps

- Leave greater distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you.
- Watch out for potential breaking of several vehicles in front of you and not only the first one, so that you are ready to slow down or stop.
- It is important to be aware of the changes in your vision and to get your eyes regularly examined.

Sensitivity to light. Sensitivity to light decreases as we age. That means that an older person needs more light to distinguish objects and more time to adjust to changes in lighting conditions. The problem becomes more

serious at night, when it is difficult for the driver to focus on the dashboard or to see the back lights of other vehicles as these are not that bright.

What helps

- Avoid driving at night. If you have to drive at night, be very careful.
- Try to increase the brightness of your vehicle's dashboard.
- Drive on roads with good lighting conditions.
- If you have sensitivity to light issues, have regular eye examinations.
- Keep the windscreen, the lights and the mirrors clear.

Do I have difficulty driving at night?

Driving at night may be a problem. If: you get anxious, it appears that most of the vehicles drive very quickly, you have difficulty reading signs that are not well lighted, the lights of the oncoming vehicles cause problems or if during the last year you got tickets for violating traffic rules or for a road accident then maybe you have problems with your vision.

What helps

- Readjust your travel so that you drive more during the day.
- Have an eye examination.
- Drive more carefully during night.
- Before embarking on your journey take time for your eyes to adjust to the darkness.

- Drive on roads with good lighting conditions where signs are easily read and there's not much glare.
- Keep your windscreen, windows, mirrors and lights clear.
- Avoid or even stop driving at night.

Do I have difficulty driving in areas I am not familiar with?

Driving in areas and roads you are not familiar with can be a problem. Do you get anxious or have difficulty following directions in areas that you do not know well? Some common mistakes are taking wide or narrow turns and driving too slowly.

What helps

- Concentrate when driving.
- Plan your route before starting your trip and if necessary, keep notes of the directions you need to follow.
- Try the route with a passenger.
- Ask a friend or a family member to join you and help you with the map or with the road signs.
- Keep a list of all the telephone numbers you may need. If necessary, safely stop at a permissible place and make the relevant phone call.

Do I have difficulty driving when it rains?

Do you get anxious when you drive in bad weather conditions? Have you had or almost had an accident during the last year? Did any friend or member of your family express any doubts about you driving in bad

weather? Driving in bad weather conditions may be a problem. Bad weather affects your ability to see well and to drive safely.

What helps

- Leave a greater distance between your vehicle and the vehicles in front of you (you must be able to see the tires of the vehicle in front of you when you have stopped).
- Reduce your speed when you expect the road to be slippery.
- Have your brakes checked.
- Use your lights no matter what time of the day you drive.
- Choose the conditions under which you are going to drive. Avoid driving in bad weather by checking the weather forecast before starting your journey.
- Keep your windscreen, windows, mirrors and lights clear.
- If the weather gets worse, stop in a safe place by the road and wait.

Do I have difficulty driving in heavy traffic?

Do you get anxious when you drive in heavy traffic? Do you have difficulty entering a road with traffic or the motorway? Are there any cases when you have priority but other vehicles do not yield? Do other drivers often hoot to you? During the last year, have you received any tickets for violating traffic rules? Have you had or almost had any accidents? Have any of your friends, members of your family or your doctor expressed any worries about you driving in heavy traffic?

Difficulty in driving in heavy traffic can be due to changes in vision, attention, memory, speed of thinking and decision making or in your mobility abilities.

What helps

- Check all the mirrors frequently.
- Keep on the right position on the road and use your flash lights so that the other drivers and the pedestrians can understand what you want to do.
- Be up to date on traffic rules and signs. Consult the Highway Code.
- Avoid highways in rush hours.
- Schedule your route before starting your journey.

Do I get too tired when I drive?

Do you get anxious when you have to drive for long distances? During the last year, have you ever felt sleepy while driving? Did you have to open the window, turn on the radio or start talking with one of your passengers in order to stay awake? Some older drivers tend to get sleepy on the road, to have memory gaps or to hear voices and noises from far away or louder than normal as well as to move slower without realising that they have stopped accelerating.

What helps

- Start your journey having had a good rest instead of feeling tired or sleepy. With a good sleep and a rest, your ability to focus when driving is improved.
- If you feel tired before you start consider postponing the trip.
- Do not drive if you have been awake for more than fifteen hours.
- If you are on a long distance journey, stop every 1-2 hours.
- If you feel tired or sleepy, ask someone else to drive for you.
- If you start feeling sleepy, safely get out of your car and walk.

Do I have difficulty driving and paying attention to other things?

Have you noticed if:

- *Do you use your brakes frequently when driving on the motorway, especially when you look for or read signs before exiting?*
- *Do you have difficulty looking for exits or exit signs while you are driving?*
- *Do you have difficulty finding a gap in traffic or does it take you long to decide for the appropriate one to enter the traffic or change lanes?*
- *Do you have difficulty having a conversation or listening to the radio while driving?*

If you have answered positively to one of the above questions, the following information may interest you.

As we age, doing various things simultaneously becomes more difficult. On the road, the driver must pilot the vehicle, change gears and at the same time look ahead of you, check the mirrors to watch other vehicles, check the speed and generally direct his attention on various tasks. It is even harder to do all these, while he is disturbed by what happens inside the vehicle (e.g. by a passenger or the radio) or outside the vehicle (e.g. by the bad weather).

What helps

- Focus on the road while you are driving.
- Avoid doing things that disturb you e.g. talking on the phone, listening to the radio, talking with your passengers or reading a map.

- Avoid driving under difficult conditions such as bad weather or heavy traffic.
- Plan your route before you start your journey. If needed, consult a map before embarking on the journey.
- Avoid areas you are not familiar with so that you can drive without getting anxious, you know where you must use your flash light and which lane you should follow to turn as well as where you can easily find a parking place.
- When you drive in an area you are not familiar with, ask one of your passengers to help you find your way.
- You must keep your glasses in a place where you can easily reach them. You can do the same with the money you will need for the tolls. If it is needed for your trip, find the route on a map before you start driving.

Do I have difficulty finding a specific road sign amongst others road signs?

On the road, a driver must quickly pay attention to situations around him but he needs to focus on the most important of them. Do you have difficulty finding a specific sign among many others e.g. the sign with a street's name? This problem is related to "selective" attention which is the ability to ignore anything that is not important for driving and to focus on the important things. This ability declines with age and thus the accident possibility has increased.

What helps

- Avoid driving in areas with many traffic signs.
- Plan your route before embarking on your trip.
- Ask one of your passengers to help you find the route.
- Avoid areas you are not familiar with.
- Avoid driving in heavy traffic.

Do I have problems with my memory?

During the last year, have you ever had difficulty finding your parked car or finding your way back from an area you know well? Have you got lost while driving? You might have a problem with your memory. Memory helps us remembering a known route or the rules for safe road behaviour. It is also very important to help you solve problems and make decisions. Even healthy older drivers may have problems remembering the traffic rules or what they must do under specific conditions. This problem must be seriously taken into account as it increases the accident possibility.

What helps

- Ask your doctor to check your memory.
- Plan your route before you start your journey.
- Drive the route ahead of time in order to get familiar with it.
- Pay extra attention to anything you want to remember but you may have difficulty in doing so. It will help you remember it in the future.
- With a good sleep and a rest, your ability to focus on driving is improved.

Do I have difficulty backing up and difficulty turning my head?

When you drive, you must turn your head and look through your rear window while you hold your steering wheel with your one hand. If you do not look back, you may not see other vehicles or pedestrians approaching. If you have difficulty turning your head backwards or checking the traffic or even getting in and out of your car, your mobility may be reduced. As we age mobility gets worse and there are difficulties in backing up, checking the traffic and changing lanes. Furthermore, reaction time increases and turning the steering wheel or pushing the brakes becomes more difficult. Mobility can be improved with physical activity.

What helps

- Ask your doctor for advice on exercises or special programs that can improve your mobility.
- Avoid driving long distances without stopping. When you stop you can help yourself with some stretching exercises.
- Have special mirrors placed in your car.

Do I have difficulty with the driving pedals and the steering wheel while driving?

If you have difficulty turning the steering wheel or using the pedals you may have a problem with your muscle strength. Such a problem has implications to your ability to accelerate, slow down or even turn the steering wheel becomes a problem.

What helps

- Ask your doctor for advice on exercises or special programs that can improve your muscle strength, your flexibility and your reaction time.
- Drive a vehicle with power steering.
- The equipment in modern cars such as: the automatic transmission, adjustable mirrors, adjustable seats, automatic wipers and active lights for improved lighting on turns, allows you have better control of the vehicle and therefore feel more comfortable.

Do emotions affect my driving?

Do traffic conditions make me feel nervous or angry?

Traffic conditions such as very slow traffic flow may cause nervousness or anger to some drivers. The fear of other drivers or the pressure of arriving late may lead to a very dangerous outcome such as speeding, driving too close to other vehicles, making abrupt manoeuvres, hooting, suddenly appearing in front of other vehicles and blocking junctions.

What helps

- Avoid driving under conditions that make you angry. Calm traffic conditions help you stay calm as well and drive carefully.

When I am upset, is this reflected in my driving?

As we age, experience and making correct decisions makes us better drivers. However, if when you were younger, and were an aggressive driver, you may still be one. Today, due to the decline in your abilities that are related to driving, you may not be able to deal with dangerous situations that are caused by an aggressive way of driving. Emotional pressure such as great anger or joy can distract you from driving.

What helps

- When you realise that you are upset, try to delay your journey until you calm down, go for a walk or even talk to a friend.

Am I in good condition when I drive?

Do I ask my doctor or my pharmacist whether medication will affect my driving and generally my ability to drive well?

Older people usually take more medication compared to younger people. Medication can decrease one's ability to make decisions or process information quickly. This is a serious for driving since safe driving demands making quick decisions.

Another serious danger is the combination of medicine which can be prescribed by different doctors (each one of who may not be aware of other prescriptions) and this can probably lead to unexpected negative results.

Alcohol consumption may have similar serious physical and psychological effects. It is important to avoid the consumption of beverages while you are on medication because that can have multiple negative consequences in your driving abilities. You must avoid drinking when you are about to drive.

What helps

- Ask for advice from your doctor or your pharmacist on what you should be careful of when you take medication while driving.
- Read the prescription, the labels and the instructions on the medication to get informed about their side effects and their impact on driving. Consult your pharmacist as well.
- Different medication interacts negatively. Their combination increases side effects. Inform all your doctors about the medication

you are on and ask them to identify any side effects that affect your safe driving.

- Schedule your driving in a way so that your body's reaction to potential negative effects of medicine does not occur while you are driving.
- Get into the habit of avoiding alcohol before driving. Avoid getting in a car if the driver has been drinking.

Am I informed about the practices for good health?

You can do so many things to take care of your health. What you eat, how much you exercise, how often you visit your doctor or how strictly you follow his advice depends on you and may help you continue driving for longer.

You must stay informed and seek to learn more about the healthy habits that can help you keep your body and mind in a good state so that you can drive safely such as being alert and responding to emergencies quickly.

What helps

- Visit your doctor regularly. Your doctor can advise you on nutrition, medical examinations, physical activity and the combination of medicines and alcohol.
- Adopt healthy habits: adopt a healthy lifestyle, always in agreement with your doctor.

Am I prepared for changes in the way I travel?

Are my friends and family concerned about my ability to drive well?

Older drivers sometimes do not realise the existing risk of accident involvement. In addition, they often underestimate the extent to which their actions and problems contribute to accident risk.

The honest opinion of your family and your friends may give you important information on your driving and may help you improve and avoid accidents.

What helps

- If your children do not permit you to drive their children this is a clear sign that you need to have someone assess your driving.
- Ask people you trust to honestly tell you how safe they consider your driving to be.
- Listen carefully to their comments and you may spot problems you make without being aware of it. You can ask for advice a Driving Instructor or visit your doctor to help you deal with a problem you might have.
- Make sure your doctor knows about these concerns.
- Be prepared for the day you will not be able to drive anymore. This can be done by using other means of transport.

How many tickets for traffic rule violation have I received during the last one or two years?

Many older drivers are aware of their limitations and deal with their difficulties. Some others over-estimate their potential and underestimate the possibility of an accident occurring. The most common problems are related to priority, changing lanes, left turns, sign recognition, careless driving at intersections, backing up and driving too slowly.

It is important to adjust your driving in order to deal with problems that may contribute to an accident. An adjustment to driving can be achieved by choosing when and where you are going to drive as well as by deciding how you are going to drive.

If you have received one or two tickets or warnings this means that you are not familiar with the Highway Code, especially with the signs and the traffic rules. If the number of tickets is high, then you must seriously reconsider the way you drive.

What helps

- Think about the reason you got the ticket e.g. not following a sign. Were you not paying attention or did you just not see the sign? Some information in this handbook may be useful to you.
- Tickets are a warning for a future accident. Act quickly. Depending on your problem, your doctor or a specialised Driving Instructor for senior drivers can help you.

How many road accidents have I had during the last one or two years?

An accident can work as the best possible prediction for the next one. This means that more accidents may occur in the future. If you have had more accidents you must seriously reconsider the way you drive. Drivers with many accidents usually drive under difficult conditions such as at night and in bad weather. The biggest risk is to deny the fact that your driving abilities decline as you age. It is important that you change your dangerous driving habits and follow other safer driving practices.

What helps

- Visit your doctor and make sure that he knows about it.
- An objective opinion regarding your driving can always be helpful.
- Even if you are not responsible for the accident, defensive driving techniques can help you prevent an unpleasant incident. Ask for advice at a Driving School. There are some Driving Schools that can help you refresh your driving skills and defensive driving techniques and to get acquainted with the traffic rules again. Ask for a specialized instructor for senior drivers.
- If you have had any accidents lately, make a decision to improve your driving techniques, reduce or quit driving.
- Be prepared for the day you will not be able to drive anymore and examine your options for remaining mobile without driving.

Do I suffer from any serious eye disease?

As we get older, the risk of developing eye diseases is higher. Most eye diseases do not have dramatic symptoms in their early stages. The earlier an eye disease is detected, the better the results of treatment are. Some common eye diseases that can affect one's ability to drive are:

- *Cataracts*. Vision is blurry and becomes more difficult at night or with the glare of the sun.
- *Glaucoma*. Glaucoma causes gradual loss of vision starting at the side, top and bottom vision and progressing until all vision may be lost.
- *Macular degeneration*. There are parts in your vision field where you can't see anything.

It is necessary to have your eyes regularly examined because such problems may not be detected until your vision has significantly reduced.

Do I suffer from any chronic disease?

There are many diseases that may affect your ability to drive safely. Each of them has different consequences to your ability in driving safely. In some cases driving activities should be reduced or should not even be allowed. Some of these diseases are as follows:

- Diabetes
- Loss of hearing
- Epilepsy
- Heart disease
- Arthritic conditions
- Parkinson's disease
- Stroke

- Dementia
- Reduced flexibility

It is necessary to visit your doctor and have medical check-ups on a regular basis. In every case, make sure your doctor knows about your driving activity.

Am I aware of the state of my health; am I prepared for changes in the way I travel?

All drivers are responsible for their own safety as well as for the safety of their passengers, other drivers and pedestrians. Their physical abilities do not allow them driving safely forever.

Vision, hearing, reaction time, flexibility and general condition of your health needs to be checked on a regular basis in order to make all the necessary changes and to remain a safe driver. These changes may also affect other ways that you can or cannot get around.

As driving at an older age becomes less safe, it becomes necessary to change your driving habits or even the way you travel. With the help of your family and friends you can look for other alternatives to driving that best suit you and will help you stay mobile such as:

- Walking. It is important that you take all the necessary precautions as a pedestrian. For example, cross the road when the light is green for pedestrians and use the pedestrian crossings.
- Taxis unions providing service on call may be very useful.
- Public transport. If this is convenient for you, use buses, trams, the metro and trains with easy access.
- Your family and friends may be able to assist you in getting around. You can reciprocate for them in other ways.

- Other services at local community. Ask for information on the local transport means and the programmes in your area as well as for other transportation programmes that may be organised by your Municipality.

What are the regulations regarding the driving license renewal?

According to the Highway Code, after the age of 65, the driving license is renewed every three years if specific conditions checked by doctors, apply. Nevertheless, at some point, there may be indications of serious changes which may cause you difficulties or problems when driving. Some of them may be identified by your doctor or even by yourself. If this happens, it will be necessary to reduce or stop driving and find other ways for getting around.

Responsible Public Authority: Departments of Transportation of the Prefectural Authorities.

Information can be found at Citizens' Service Centers (KEP) and at the following website: <http://www.ermis.gov.gr>

Can I get acquainted with Public Transport Means?

Depending on your physical condition, your habits and your needs, you should consider using Public Transport as an alternative way of travelling. The following information is provided by the Athens Urban Transport Organisation (OASA) and can give you an idea about the benefits of using public transport in Athens. More detailed information can be found at the following address: <http://www.oasa.gr/>.

- OASA has a policy of reduced fares for people over 65 years old.
- You can get information regarding the time tables of public transport means within Athens by calling number 185. Keep in mind that schedules can be altered during the weekends and on holidays.
- Through the website of OASA (<http://www.oasa.gr/>) you can use the informational service called "Best Route Quest". Furthermore, the telematics system of HLPAP provides the passengers of specific means with updated information regarding the next stop with a written message displayed in front of the vehicle. In addition, a pilot telematics system has been installed in six "smart stops" of HLPAP, where passengers waiting at the stop are informed about when the next vehicle will arrive.
- Elevators are installed at all the metro and HLPAP stations and special equipment makes buses and trolleys more easily accessible.

Safe access to public transport means is a determining factor in selecting them. Choose the stop that is the most easily and safely accessible for you, for example by avoiding roads or intersections with traffic. It is recommended that you plan your route so that you can use pedestrian crossings, and even more preferably, traffic signs for pedestrians. At large intersections, pedestrians have limited time to cross the road since there

are numerous traffic streams and roads are wide. It is important that in the areas where pedestrians can stand and wait, they are not blocked by parked vehicles or exposed to the traffic.

How can I be accommodated in the area where I live?

Gather information on the municipal public transport in your area, the transport services provided by your municipality and the relative schedules/programs. Transfer is not charged and, usually, schedules are organised in such a way so that citizens' needs within the wider area of the municipality, are covered.