

Transportation Sensitivity

Understanding the changes that may be associated with aging

Older persons are not disabled because they are old. The aging process may result in disabling conditions.¹ These conditions may reduce physical strength and stamina, so it is important to try to be understanding and patient. It helps to be aware of the changes associated with aging when caring for an older adult. Many of the human body's functions are affected by aging, which may impact one's vision, balance, or cause pain, all of which can create transportation challenges. This tip sheet offers suggestions for caregivers to promote a safe and positive experience for both driver and passenger.

Vision Impairment

When transporting someone with a vision impairment, it is good to explain exactly what you are doing and why. If he uses a cane or dog guide, always lead by standing on the opposite side of the cane or the dog, and stay one-half pace ahead.²

Ask if he would like assistance before providing it. If possible, have him exit from the non-traffic side of the car. Be specific when giving directions on the first visit to a location (i.e. to your right/left, approximately 100 feet, etc.)



Problems with Balance

Loss of muscle strength and coordination, arthritis in the knees and ankles, and changes in the inner ear all hinder balance- especially as people age. This can make getting in and out of a car and positioning in the car difficult. Allow someone who has problems with balance plenty of time to enter and exit the car. It may take a few extra seconds for him to gain balance when moving from a sitting to standing position.³

National Center on Senior Transportation
1425 K Street NW Suite 200 Washington, D.C. 20005
(202)347-3066 (202)737-7914 (Fax) (202)347-7385 (TDD)
Toll-free: (866)528-NCST (6278)
www.seniortransportation.net

Pain

Older adults experience pain from a multitude of conditions – some short term, some periodic, and some chronic or long term. For example, people with joint pain, such as arthritis, may find it painful to enter and exit a vehicle. To be sensitive to this, give your passenger extra time and provide assistance with a gentle touch. Additionally, people with dementia can become agitated due to pain, especially if they cannot verbally communicate what they are feeling. If asked a yes or no question about this, they may be able to tell you whether they are experiencing pain. ⁴

Seizure Disorders

Seizure disorders, such as epilepsy, are not necessarily age related; however, older persons can have seizures secondary to certain age-related conditions or diseases. The Epilepsy Foundation of America offers the following recommendations for handling a grand mal seizure:

- Do not try to restrain your loved one. Let the seizure run its course.
- Clear the area around him, and try not to interfere with any movements.
- Don't force anything between his teeth. If his mouth is already open, you can place a soft object such as a handkerchief between his side teeth.
- Call a doctor if it is followed almost immediately by another major seizure or if it lasts for more than ten minutes. When the seizure is over, let him rest if needed. ⁵

If you haven't already done so, take the time to watch the DVD "Transportation Solutions for Caregivers". It can be ordered through the NCST Web site at www.seniortransportation.net.

Source:

Easter Seals. Inc. *Transportation Solutions for Caregivers: A Starting Point*

References

1. Paratransit Insurance Corporation. Drivers Safety Course: Passenger Awareness – Student Text. Gold Country Telecare, Inc.: Grass Valley, Calif.
2. *Trading Places: Assisting Passengers with Special Needs*. Kansas RTAP Driver Training, September/October 2000.
3. Ibid.
4. Paratransit Insurance Corporation. Drivers Safety Course: Passenger Awareness – Student Text. Gold Country Telecare, Inc.: Grass Valley, Calif.
5. *Trading Places: Assisting Passengers with Special Needs*. Kansas RTAP Driver Training, September/October 2000.



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