

A Turn For The Worse

In 2009, researchers from the University of Massachusetts Amherst performed a study and shared the results. The study was prompted by a desire to gain more information on older automobile operators and their deteriorating driving abilities. While it has long been known that older drivers, due to deteriorating sight, hearing and reaction times, become more involved in auto accidents; the study pinpointed a particular problem: errors in making turns.

While advanced age makes worse drivers of us all, there is a particular decline in doing what is necessary to properly operate a car while turning onto roads, streets, driveways, etc. Older drivers need to develop habits to help compensate for this increased vulnerability. Awareness and training in making sufficient sideways glances of traffic is critical to avoid accidents. This helps to make up for two problems faced by older drivers, poorer peripheral vision and slower reflexes.

The researchers first gathered a group of senior drivers (all between 70-89 years old). Second, they created a control group, a group that received in-class driver training on making turns, and a third group that received interactive training on turns in a simulator. Finally, they observed the groups under actual driving conditions. They found that, while the various levels of training improved their driving habits, the group was still more vulnerable to misjudging peripheral activity; making side collisions more likely.

Most drivers are concerned about making corrections in their driving habits as they get older. Effective compensation methods are well-known and actively used such as:

- Getting routine physical exams to check for fitness to operate a car
- Avoid driving while on medication that can affect vehicle operation
- Minimize or eliminate driving during rush hours, nighttime or in bad weather
- Adjusting vehicle speeds (slowing down) to allow more time to react to traffic

However older drivers don't appear to be aware of their lack of making frequent sideways glances in order to check for other vehicles. Fortunately, the study also revealed that older drivers are receptive to receiving information and training to help with their driving. The study may result in developing additional screening to be used in testing older drivers for continued vehicle licensing.

COPYRIGHT: Insurance Publishing Plus, Inc. 2009

All rights reserved. Production or distribution, whether in whole or in part, in any form of media or language; and no matter what country, state or territory, is expressly forbidden without written consent of Insurance Publishing Plus, Inc.