

## Sharing a Drive to Protect Motorists

CarFit was developed by the American Society on Aging in collaboration with AARP, American Occupational Therapy Association and AAA. Program events are designed to provide a quick but comprehensive check of how well you and your vehicle work together. A trained professional will ask you simple questions and complete a 12-point CarFit checklist. The entire process takes about 20 minutes, and you leave with recommended car adjustments and adaptations, a list of resources in your area and greater peace of mind. CarFit checks are not available in all areas. Contact your local AAA club, AARP state office or an occupational therapy practitioner for more information on how to maintain and strengthen your driving health.

[www.Car-Fit.org](http://www.Car-Fit.org)



AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to making life better for people ages 50 and older.

[www.AARP.org/Drive](http://www.AARP.org/Drive)



The American Occupational Therapy Association represents more than 140,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. Occupational therapy practitioners help people of all ages engage in daily activities, including driving, with independence and dignity.

[www.AOTA.org/OlderDriver](http://www.AOTA.org/OlderDriver)



AAA is a not-for-profit organization serving more than 51 million members in the United States and Canada. AAA has been a leading safety advocate for more than a century.

[www.AAA.com](http://www.AAA.com) • [www.AAASeniors.com](http://www.AAASeniors.com)

# CARFit

Helping Mature Drivers Find Their Safest Fit



## Recognize the Need

**The number of older drivers is growing.** The U.S. Census Bureau has determined that by 2030, one in five Americans will be age 65 or older, which means there will be more than 65 million older drivers on our roads. It is critically important that these mature drivers make safety a personal priority. Driving today is more difficult than ever because of more traffic, bigger vehicles and faster speeds. Engineers who design vehicles and roadways are making improvements to adapt to these demands, but older drivers themselves can take measures to better understand their vehicle's safety features and achieve their safest "fit."

### Making Your Vehicle Fit

One thing older drivers can do to adapt to factors that may affect their driving is to make individual adjustments to find their best person-to-vehicle fit. These adjustments will help drivers benefit from their vehicle's safety features by helping them feel more comfortable and in better control behind the wheel.

### What Can You Do?

You can find out how the fit of your vehicle affects your driving and adjust your vehicle to your changing needs. Doing this could make a lifesaving difference to you and your loved ones.

Am I really  
at risk?



## We Change as We Age

**As we age,** changes in our vision, flexibility, strength, range of motion and even height may make us less comfortable and reduce our control behind the wheel.

Older drivers may need to find ways to cope with physical changes that include:

- Reduced strength and physical endurance.
- Stiff neck and limited head rotation.
- Visual impairments, including problems with depth perception, high- and low-contrast vision, night vision and delayed recovery from glare.
- Effects of medications.
- Reduced overall range of motion and flexibility.

Increasing exercise, improving nutrition and making sure you get regular eye exams and medical checkups may help. In addition, automakers are designing vehicles geared to the needs of older drivers. These new models provide features such as more precise seating adjustments, clearer dashboard displays, wider doors, easier seat controls, night vision technology and adjustable gas and brake pedals.



## Am I Comfortable and in Control Behind the Wheel?

**Checking to see that you** and your vehicle fit well together can be as important to your safety as a mechanical checkup. A good fit means you have:

- **A clear line of sight over the steering wheel.** Your line of sight should be at least three inches above the top of the steering wheel.
- **Plenty of room between your breastbone (or chest) and the air bag in the steering wheel.** The distance should be at least 10 inches to allow adequate room for the air bag to deploy.
- **A seat you fit in comfortably and safely.** Each time you drive, you should be able to adjust the seat for good visibility and easy access to controls.
- **Properly adjusted head restraint.** This can help prevent neck injury. When adjusting the head restraint, you may want to ask a friend to help you grasp the restraint and pull it up. The center of the restraint should be about three inches or less from the center of the back of your head, not against your neck.
- **Easy access to gas and brake pedals.** You should be able to reach the pedals without having to stretch too far, and you should be able to completely depress the brake pedal. You also should be able to move your foot easily from the gas to the brake.
- **A seat belt that holds you in the proper position and remains comfortable as you drive.** The lap belt should be placed low across your hips, and the shoulder belt should cross mid-shoulder and across your chest. A seat belt should never go behind your back or under your arm.

You also should be able to:

- Reach the shoulder belt and buckle and unbuckle the seat belt without difficulty.
- Get into and out of your vehicle easily.
- Turn your head to look over your shoulder when changing lanes and backing up.
- Sit comfortably, without knee, back, hip, neck or shoulder stiffness or pain.



## Position Your Mirrors to Minimize Blind Spots

**You can adjust your mirrors** to greatly reduce blind spots.

- Before starting your vehicle, adjust the rearview mirror so it shows as much of the rear window as possible.
- While in the driver's seat, place your head near the left window and adjust the left side-view mirror so you can just see the side of your vehicle.
- Then position your head near the middle of the vehicle, above the center console, and adjust the right side-view mirror so you can just see the side of your vehicle.

Now you should have a better view of approaching and passing vehicles. Minor mirror adjustments may be needed to ensure an ideal view.

It may take time to adjust to this view. Therefore, it is important before driving with the new settings to practice looking at objects at the side and rear of your car. With this added experience of using your vehicle's mirrors, you will have more confidence on the road. In addition to using your side-view mirrors, you also should confirm the way is clear by looking over your shoulder.

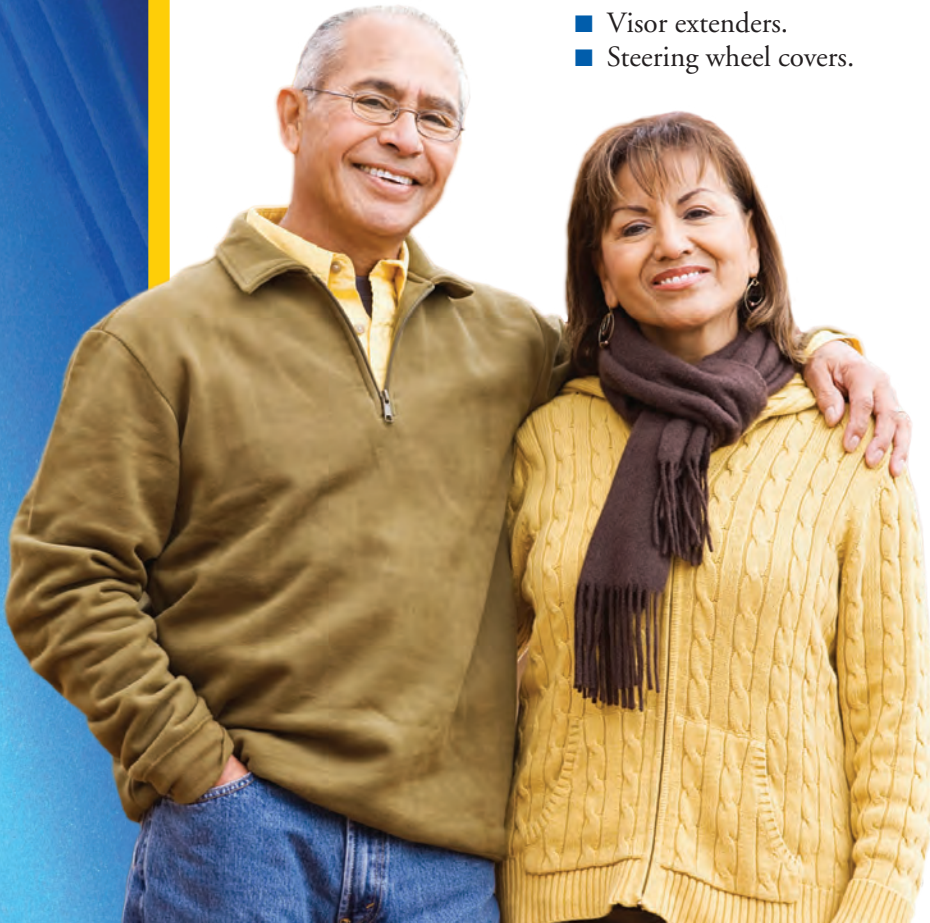
## Adaptive Devices Can Help

**If you find that your vehicle** is not a perfect fit, you probably do not need to replace it. A variety of adaptive features can be added to help compensate for physical changes or simply to make the vehicle fit you more comfortably and safely.

Some of these devices are simple and readily available. Other devices and adaptations require the expert advice of an occupational therapy driver rehabilitation specialist to ensure the changes can help you continue driving with the control and awareness you have been accustomed to. You can consult an occupational therapy practitioner in your area to find out what services are recommended.

Among simple adaptive devices that do not require special training are:

- Seat belt extenders.
- Visor extenders.
- Steering wheel covers.



Other adaptive devices, which may require an expert's advice and training to use, include:

- Larger, panoramic rearview and side-view mirrors.
- Pedal extenders.
- Leverage handles to assist in opening car doors.
- Hand controls.
- Seat lifts to ease getting out of a car.
- Chair lifts and carrying devices for a wheelchair or scooter.
- A steering device to aid in grabbing the wheel and making turns easier or more efficient.
- Seat and back support cushions to relieve back pain or improve line of sight. Such cushions, however, are likely to affect how you see out of your mirrors and make contact with gas and brake pedals.

Before purchasing adaptive features, you should consult an occupational therapy practitioner to explore your options. You may consider a comprehensive driving evaluation by a driver rehabilitation specialist. Many occupational therapy practitioners are highly trained to evaluate and provide solutions for drivers with physical and visual challenges or seniors who use or need to transport mobility devices or equipment. These professionals can ensure you get the right equipment, have it properly installed and receive proper training before you take to the road.