Headline: Exercise helps keep older drivers on road

Deckhead: Fatigue, other issues cause aging adults to stop driving

Keeping physically fit has a host of benefits. Staying behind the wheel of vehicle is one of them.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that increased fatigue and poor physical functioning are leading factors that can result in older adults limiting their driving. Simple steps, though, like weekly exercise and stretching, can improve safe driving abilities and keep older adults on the road longer.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety commissioned researchers from Columbia University to evaluate eight domains – depression, anxiety, fatigue, sleep disturbance, pain interference, physical functioning, pain intensity and participation in social activities – to determine how changes in physical, mental and social health affect driving mobility for older adults. The report found that fatigue and poor physical functioning are most common among older drivers who spend less time behind the wheel.

“Older adults who give up the keys are more likely to suffer from depression than those who remain behind the wheel,” said Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. “It is important that we find ways to keep older drivers in good physical health in order to extend their mobility.”

Research shows that daily exercise and stretching can help older drivers improve overall body flexibility and move more freely to observe the road from all angles. Physical strength also helps drivers remain alert to potential hazards on the road and perform essential driving functions, like:

* Braking
* Steering
* Parking
* Looking to the side and rear
* Adjusting the safety belts
* Sitting for long periods of time

“Some decline in physical fitness is inevitable as we age,” said Jake Nelson, AAA director of traffic safety advocacy and research. “But research shows that exercise doesn’t have to be strenuous to produce positive results. You can spread out the time you spend being physically active over the course of your day and week. A few minutes at a time can be sufficient. Simple steps to keep active can keep you driving safely for longer.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends older adults, who are physically able, get between 2-5 hours of moderate-intensity exercise each week or between 75 minutes to 2.5 hours of high-intensity physical activity.

Older adults should consult their doctor before beginning the new exercise regimen. They also should talk with a healthcare provider about ways to combat fatigue. Prioritize getting at least seven hours of sleep each night to stay focused while driving.

AAA recommends a series of stretches to improve neck, shoulder, trunk, back and overall body flexibility. AAA also offers a variety of programs and resources to help older adults improve their driving performance and avoid crashes.

For more information on AAA resources for older drivers, such as RoadWiseonline/classroom courses or other programs that help seniors better fit with their vehicles, visit SeniorDriving.AAA.com.

Cutline: GOOD CONDITION – AAA research finds that exercising and stretching are factors in keeping older drivers behind the wheel. Image: Robert Kneschke. Adobe Stock.