

Baby boomers and driving vision - maintaining safety and independence

Baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, are aging differently than any generation in U.S. history. Today, older Americans remain more active later in life, working longer and engaging in hobbies and recreational activities.

It is estimated that by 2030, nearly one in five adults will be 65 and older. In 2050, this group is projected to reach 88 million - more than double the 40 million in 2010. This will lead to a significant increase in older adults driving vehicles for both necessity and pleasure. Unfortunately vision, cognitive skills and motor functions decline as we age.



As many as 5,288 people age 65 and older were killed and 187,000 were injured in traffic accidents, according to 2009 data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. That group accounted for 16 percent of all traffic deaths and 8 percent of the injured, but accounted for only 13-percent of the population. As the 65 and over demographic increases to 20 percent of the population in 2030, the number of accidents and fatalities among this group is expected to increase.

Most states have minimum vision requirements to possess a driver's license. A 2006 Vision Council report indicates that the 10 states with the highest rate of fatal crashes include four that require no vision screening for license renewal and four that only require vision screenings at intervals of eight or more years. The Vision Council also reported that only 20 states require more frequent vision screenings for older drivers.

Importantly, there are proactive measures seniors can take to preserve and enhance their vision. Many clinical research studies have demonstrated that older drivers can improve their vision by eating foods rich in the nutrients zeaxanthin (zee-uh-zan-thin) and lutein or taking eye vitamins containing these nutrients. These nutrients create a protective film in the back of the eye known as, "macular pigment" to protect and improve vision. These nutrients have been scientifically proven to enhance driving vision and driver confidence. -Your eye care professional and the American Optometric Association website are excellent sources of information regarding nutrition and eye health.

Glare is a common complaint among older drivers, particularly at night. When a driver is "blinded" by an oncoming car's lights, they are literally "driving blind" for a period of time until vision recovers.- Imagine driving at 60 mph with your eyes closed for five seconds. You would travel 440 feet during that five second period - the equivalent of one and a half football fields. Studies have demonstrated that recovery time from bright light-induced glare can be reduced by as much as five seconds by increasing macular pigment density through zeaxanthin and lutein supplementation.

Dense or thick MPOD (Macular Pigment Optical Density) can reduce uncomfortable and dangerous glare caused by oncoming headlights, street lights, and traffic lights; enhance contrast sensitivity to help drivers see pedestrians, vehicles, and other objects; and help diminish discomfort or sensitivity to bright sunlight. -

While lutein is commonly available in the average diet from dark green leafy vegetables like spinach and broccoli, dietary zeaxanthin is scarce in the average U.S. daily diet. Corn, orange peppers, brightly colored fruits and vegetables, and eggs contain low quantities of zeaxanthin, which means one would have to eat approximately 20 ears of corn to obtain the daily recommended amount of dietary zeaxanthin associated with healthy macular pigment.

Eye vitamins like EyePromise are doctor recommended, proven and guaranteed to increase macular pigment. The dietary zeaxanthin contained in EyePromise eye vitamin formulas is derived from unique orange paprika peppers, a natural botanical source rich in this important nutrient.

Many Optometrists and Ophthalmologists offer MPOD (Macular Pigment Optical Density) measurement through a simple, fast, and inexpensive exam. Contact your eye care professional about having your macular pigment measured, and increasing your MPOD if needed.

Driving safety is important at any age, but as our population ages at an unprecedented pace, proactively taking care of your vision is vital to safety and independence.