

Exercise could help make driving safer for seniors

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You have probably heard a million reasons why exercise is good for you.

But now, research finds another reason to exercise that you might not have thought of.

You already know exercise makes you look younger, feel better and live longer. It even produces new brain cells and a stronger immune system.

Research now finds it could help you be a safer driver into your senior years.

"We tend to really discount the driving task as only vision or maybe only reaction time, but it's really a comprehensive training of the entire body, mind and body," said Dr. Joseph F. Coughlin, the Director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab.

More than 10 years of research at The Hartford Center for Mature Market Excellence and M.I.T's AgeLab, found that specific exercises for strength, range of motion, flexibility and coordination had an impact on driving skills.

"The participants reported a greater ease of turning their heads and bodies to compensate for blind spots that they were able to rotate to scan the driving environment and to be able to do right hand turns just a little bit better," Dr. Coughlin noted.

Half of people older than 50 don't know that exercise will help with driving and with aging baby boomers, the number of senior drivers is on the rise. Experts say driving can be essential to emotional well-being.

"Driving is certainly important in independence but it helps us bring pleasure in our lives," explained Jodi Olshevski, Executive Director of The Hartford Center for Mature Market Excellence. "It helps us to do the things, not only that we need to do, but (what) we want to do, stay connected with others, run out for a second and get an ice cream at the spur of the moment, run to the bank to get something that you need, "

And when there are warning signs that an elderly person should stop driving, Olshevski said to have several, supportive conversations with the driver.

"We know from older drivers that they would rather hear from an adult family member than anybody else," Olshevski said. "And most often, if they have had a conversation, they're pretty likely to listen to what that adult child or relative says."

She said family members should pick the person best suited to do the talking.

To get a free guide for those exercises and to watch a video demonstration go to www.thehartford.com/lifetime

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