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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Occupational Therapy Practitioners Strive Towards Helping Their Older Patients Remain Independent Through Safe Driving**

*Adapted from [www.AOTA.org](http://www.AOTA.org)*

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association, “staying connected to your community is an important part of your well-being. Driving our own car is how we stay mobile and on the go. Driving is how we see the people we want to see and how we do the things we want to do at our convenience. Changes in our physical, mental, and sensory abilities can challenge our continued ability to drive safely. Because occupational therapy practitioners take the time to understand the role that driving plays in your life, they are able to help individuals make a smoother transition from driving to using other forms of transportation.”

By the year 2020, it is estimated that the United States will hold 54 million Americans over 65 years of age. The crash rate rises steadily for drivers 65 and older, and those drivers are involved in more crashes than any other age group except teenagers. Preserving freedom and mobility for older drivers helps maintain their autonomy and independence. Careful consideration must be taken to insure the safety of our loved ones, as individual skills differ for every driver.

As we age, eyesight begins to deteriorate and we must deal with decreased hearing ability. As a result, reading road signs and detecting the flash of brake lights may become difficult. Hearing high-pitched tones such as sirens and horns may also be a challenge. As our field of vision narrows with age, we may also be at an increased risk of a side collision. Weaker muscles, reduced flexibility, and limited range of motion, may also slow reaction time in a crisis.

### **What can an Occupational Therapist do?**

- Evaluate older adults to determine any physical, visual, or cognitive limitations that could affect how he or she is able to drive a car.
- Conduct an on-the-road driving test to determine how problems identified in the evaluation affect a person’s ability to drive safely.
- Provide training to drivers that improves their ability to drive safely.
- Recommend adaptive equipment and train older drivers how to use the equipment to help them continue to drive and get around safely and appropriately.
- Help the older adult identify alternate forms of transportation, such as public transportation, if it becomes clear that the client should no longer drive or should modify when they drive.
- Consult with friends and family of an older driver about his or her abilities and how they can ensure the older adult is able to continue participating in activities that give meaning to his or her life.
- Assist the older adult who is no longer able to drive to identify meaningful activities that do not require driving.

To learn more about the American Occupational Therapy Association or to download a handy guide on “How to Help an Older Driver”, please visit their website at <http://www.aota.org>.