

# Your car and your safety



**With healthier lifestyles and better medical care, we are living longer than ever. But as we age, our bodies are more susceptible to injury and less able to cope with the impact of a crash.**

Choosing the safest car you can afford will ensure it has features that can help you avoid a crash, as well as protect you if you are involved in a crash. This can make all the difference to your safety, whether you are the driver or a passenger in the vehicle.

## The right car for you

Older drivers are at more risk of serious injury in a crash than all other age groups because of their increased frailty.

At 80 years of age, you are five times more likely to sustain injuries from a transport crash that will result in death when compared to 50 years of age.

The most important thing when buying a new or a used car is the vehicle's ability to protect its occupants as well as other road users. In general, it is best to buy the newest and largest car you are comfortable with and can afford, and to consider the safety features that are offered.

Many of us drive every day without thinking about the risks that come with being behind the wheel. All of us need to make sure we are fit to drive, or we risk harming ourselves and others.

If you have a serious, permanent or long-term illness, disability, medical condition or injury, or an existing condition that deteriorates, you must:

- talk to a doctor about how it might affect your driving
- contact Medical Review to report your condition
- send Medical Review a medical report from a doctor who knows your medical history.

## Safety features

Design and technologies now featured in cars can help to protect you in a crash and even assist to prevent a crash.



People inside a car are better protected in the event of a crash due to modern vehicle features—such as front, side and curtain airbags. All new cars since 2011 have electronic stability control (ESC) which can help to avoid a crash.

Additional safety features to consider are auto emergency braking (AEB), blind spot warning systems and lane departure systems. These safety features are becoming more common and can now be found in affordable newer cars.

See the Quick links on the last page of this factsheet to find resources that provide more information about vehicle safety features.

## Safety ratings

There are two programs in Australia that provide consumers with vehicle safety ratings:

- The Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) publishes reports on crash test results of new cars which describe how well they protect their occupants and pedestrians.
- The Used Car Safety Ratings (UCSR) provides safety comparisons of used cars based on real world crashes. The UCSR also has a category of 'Safer Picks' car models that have been found to cause less-serious injuries to other drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists in a crash and have lower risk of being involved in a crash.

Both programs use a star rating system from one to five stars: the more stars, the safer the vehicle. It is recommended to only buy a car with a five star ANCAP or UCSR rating.

Information about safety ratings can be found on the TAC website [howsafeisyourcar.com.au](https://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au)

## Buying a car



In general, buy a new car, or as close to a new car as you can afford. If buying a used car, ask the seller for a fully-documented service history of the vehicle. If a service history is not available, be aware that there may be problems which could have an impact on your safety.

## Adjusting your car

The adjustment of your car seat, mirrors and steering wheel can make a big difference to your comfort as a driver, and even more difference to your safety.

Sitting in the right position in the vehicle allows the safety systems to work as they were designed. Sitting in the wrong position can reduce the effectiveness of the car's safety features.



It is important to ensure that your car is set up to suit you. Adjust the driver's seat, internal and external mirrors, and seatbelt, to ensure you are sitting comfortably and have optimal vision of your surroundings.

If you are struggling to adjust your car yourself, an occupational therapist (OT) trained in driver assessment can provide assistance.

A list of OTs qualified in driver assessment can be found on the **Transport Victoria website** in the form of a PDF on the Health professionals completing medical reviews page: **Victorian Occupational Therapy Driver Assessors**.

## Modifying your car

Some modifications to your car might be needed if your physical requirements as a driver have changed due to a health condition or disability.

In some circumstances, vehicle modifications can assist you to continue to drive safely and independently.

Examples of vehicle modifications include fitting of steering aids (such as 'spinner knobs'), changes to pedals (like a left foot accelerator), exchanging foot pedals for hand controls, installing extended mirrors and assistance with access in and out of the car.



Before you have any such modifications made, it is important to seek independent, professional advice. Some of these modifications can only be used by people with a disability or health condition and require the successful completion of an occupational therapy driver assessment.

OTs specialising in driver assessment or Disabled Motorists Australia are a good place to start. See the Quick links in this factsheet to get in touch.

## Quick links for further information

### Transport Victoria website

[transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review](https://transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review)

Search on the following terms to find specific information:

- vehicle safety
- occupational therapy driver assessment.

### TAC Car Safety Ratings

[howsafeisyourcar.com.au](https://howsafeisyourcar.com.au)

### RACV Shops

ANCAP brochures, the *Used Car Safety Ratings Buyer's Guide*, the RACV's *Make the right choice: Vehicle safety advice for older drivers* and *Keeping mobile: Vehicle modifications for drivers and passengers with a disability* are available at all shops.

### Australasian New Car Assessment Program

[ancap.com.au](https://ancap.com.au)

### Disabled Motorists Australia

email: [dma@disabledmotorists.org.au](mailto:dma@disabledmotorists.org.au)

telephone: 03 9386 0413

## Find out more



If you have any questions please email us at [medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au](mailto:medicalreview@roads.vic.gov.au) or visit our website and search 'vehicle safety' or 'occupational therapy driver assessment'.

Call: 13 11 71

Web: [transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review](https://transport.vic.gov.au/medical-review)



Language Loop (formerly Victorian Interpreting & Translating Services - VITS) call (03) 9280 0783, then ask for 13 11 71.