



Parkinson Association of Orange County

Driving Resources – Enhancing Your Ability to Drive in Spite of Parkinson’s Disease

There are organizations dedicated to maximizing transportation options for persons with disabilities including Parkinson’s Disease. One of these organizations is the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists. Why would a person with Parkinson’s or their loved ones have an interest in such an organization? Everyone who lives a long life may eventually question whether he or she is still able to drive as well as in the prime of life. Reflexes can slow, vision can deteriorate, and pain can reduce the ability to turn one’s head or hold onto the wheel of the vehicle. For people with Parkinson’s and their families, or anyone with a degenerative disease, these concerns can become even stronger.

Most of us want to extend the period of time we are able to drive for as long as possible and be independent. But it can be hard to determine on our own when our health might prevent us from doing so safely. It may take a trained professional to determine whether our driving skills are still good enough, or can be improved enough through the wise use of technology, to make driving a safe thing to do.

The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) can test your driving skills and, in fact, if your doctor or a family member reports concerns to them about your ability to drive, they are required to conduct a driving test to check on whether those concerns are warranted, but many people worry about going to take that test because it is not oriented toward helping them overcome any difficulties they might be having with driving. (See <http://www.dmv.ca.gov/dl/driversafety/dsmedcontraffic.htm> for copies of the DMV policy on driving tests for disabled drivers)

A professional Driver Rehabilitation Specialist is trained to both assess a person’s driving ability and also to offer help in improving those skills and modifying a vehicle if needed to make driving easier. Working with someone who wants to help people be successful in maintaining their ability to drive as long as possible can make all the difference. Information about Driver Rehabilitation Specialists, including a directory of members in Orange County, can be found on the organization’s website at the following URL: <http://www.driver-ed.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>

The National Parkinson Foundation has an interesting article on its website describing simulator studies done to help Parkinson’s patients retain their driving skills. You can read a copy of the article at the following URL: <http://www.parkinson.org/About-Us/Press-Room/NPF-In-The-News/2010/February/Simulation-study-may-help-Parkinson-s-patients-ret.aspx>

According to the study, which tested 30 patients with stage two or three Parkinson’s Disease (PD), drivers with PD are three times more likely to have a car accident than healthy drivers. The reasons include motor, visuospatial and cognitive impairments. One of the goals of the study is to extend PD patient’s safe driving time by as much as three years on average by assessing abilities and offering ways to compensate for any shortcomings. It is important to do everything necessary to maintain independence as long as possible.