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Few Seniors Aware of Effects of Medications on Driving

While prescription medications are vital to maintaining health for many seniors, most older drivers are unaware of the impact of their medications on their performance behind the wheel, according to a new study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

In the study, 95 percent of respondents 55 and older said they have one or more medical conditions and 78 percent said they use one or more medications. Yet only 28 percent indicated some awareness of the potential effect on their driving associated with those medications. Surprisingly, the study found that few respondents (18 percent) had received a warning about potentially driver-impairing medications – such as ACE inhibitors sedatives and beta blockers – from a health-care professional. Some side effects of beta blockers, for instance, can include dizziness and confusion.

Further the study found that warnings about the effects of medications on driving from health-care professionals do not increase with increasing numbers of medications or with increasing number of medical conditions. The lack of warnings is particularly alarming because previous research indicates that use of a single potentially driver-impairing medication increases the risk of being in a crash.

The age range in the study was from 56 to 93, and the level of awareness of potentially driver-impairing medications decreased with age. In contrast, the number of prescription medications people were taking increased with age. Of those surveyed, 69 percent currently use one or more prescription medications that could impair driving, and 10 percent currently use five or more such medications.

With the number of drivers 55 years of age and older expected to increase by more than half by 2030, this issue will only continue to grow unless measures are taken to increase awareness about medications that can impact safe driving.

For help reviewing health issues for your family member, call our Certified Care Manager at 866-ELDERLAW.