



VICTORIA POLICE

# Distractions and older drivers

An important safety message from  
Assistant Commissioner Doug Fryer

## Road Safety for Older Pedestrians

### A safety message from Victoria Police

Distractions take a motorist's attention away from driving, which can lead to a driver missing critical events, objects, cues and lead to a loss of control of a vehicle and potentially lead to a crash.

Driver distraction falls into three main categories, with some behaviours being a combination of all three:

- Manual – taking your hands off the steering wheel (e.g., to adjust stereo controls, change a CD, reaching for a bag);
- Visual – taking your eyes off the road (e.g., looking at a mobile phone, GPS, ); and
- Cognitive – when your mind wanders away from the task of driving (e.g., daydreaming, talking to passengers).

Driving is a complex task requiring coordination of a wide range of skills. Worryingly, most drivers commonly underestimate the effects that distraction can have on them. The Monash University Accident Research Centre found that 33% of serious injury crashes involved distraction or inattention and that taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds, while driving at 50km/h, means you travel for 27 metres effectively blind.

Physical and mental changes continue to challenge all of us. Typically aging means you may experience slower reflexes and reaction times as well as reduced vision. Aging can lead to being more vulnerable to distraction and reduce a driver's ability to control the vehicle in a safe manner. Evidence suggests that young novice drivers and older drivers (over 55 years old) are more vulnerable to the effects of distraction than other drivers (Regan 2005)<sup>1</sup>.

#### Tips to reduce distraction -

- Adjust vehicle settings before you begin your journey
- Avoid complex intersections, tram routes or busy roads during peak hour
- Choose the safest route, rather than the most direct one
- Keep drivers aids to a minimum (e.g., GPS and cruise control)
- Obtain essential information in short glances of less than 2 seconds
- Take a break rather than eating, drinking or smoking while driving
- Ask passengers to be quiet if you are having difficulty concentrating while driving
- Avoid driving at sunset or sunrise – both are times of high glare and poor visibility
- Ensure children and pets are properly restrained
- Have someone else drive you to potentially stressful appointments – such as Doctors or specialist

**When you are distracted your attention is divided and you are more likely to make mistakes. The more distracted a driver becomes the more detrimental the distraction is on their ability to make observations and control the vehicle safely.**

The ability to drive is important for many older people's independence; by reducing the risk factors associated with distraction and incorporating safe driving practices, most of us can continue driving safely long into our senior years.

<sup>1</sup> (Regan 2005). 'driver Distraction: Reflections on the Past, Present and Future' in Australasian College of Road Safety 2005, Journal of the Australasian College of Road Safety, Volume 1, no 2, November 2005. P22-