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Top Safety Technologies for Old Folks

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That first gray hair at 28 is a scary sign of aging. The real signs are arthritis, diminished vision, and limited upper-body range, and they come along later. For those with real (not cosmetic) issues with age, AAA and the University of Florida have come up with a list of safety features that should be on cars. Note that many are helpful for ex-jocks in their 30s and 40s who have bum knees and bad shoulders. Here's the AAA/Florida

list with our comments. The first two are for motorists with specific issues, while the rest are for all middle-age and older drivers:

AAA smart features for mature drivers

Feature: Six-way adjustable power seats and seat heights that come between the driver's mid-thigh and lower buttocks. **For:** Drivers with from hip or leg pain, decreased leg strength, limited knee range of motion. **Why:** Easier to get in and out. Easier for drivers to enter and exit a vehicle. **They forgot:** Auto-up steering wheels and seats that slide back automatically when entering or exiting.

Feature: Extendable sun visors, big audio and heater/AC controls, display with contrasting text. **For:** Drivers with diminished vision or problems with low-contrast sensitivity. **Why:** The sun's tough enough when you're 20. **They forgot to mention:** Dual visors, one for the front, one for the side, and a handful that block the space behind the rear view mirror.

Feature: Proven crashworthiness, crash test & rollover ratings. Check the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) and the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#). **They forgot to mention:** Some automakers (usually the ones who don't get five stars) say not all crash test reflect real world conditions.

Feature: Side and dual-stage/threshold airbags whose deployment force varies with the severity of the crash. **Why:** Airbags are powerful and too much force can cause damage to older bones. **They forgot to mention:** The initial reason for ultra-powerful airbags was to protect idiots who don't buckle up.

Feature: Adjustable head restraints and extra padding. **Why:** Set too low, head restraints don't protect in a rear impact. **They forgot to mention:** Virtually all headrests are adjustable. Extra padding seems like a good idea, but a) how do you know what that means, b) how would you order it, and c) stiffer padding (that you might think is too stiff) may be just what the doctor ordered in a crash.

Feature: Antilock brakes. **Why:** Help less skilled drivers prevent skids. **They forgot to mention:** Most cars have ABS now.

Feature: Dynamic stability control. **Why:** Helps keep car from sliding or skidding; helps keep SUVs upright. **They forgot to mention:** After seat belts, this is the single most important safety feature you can get on a car. Yes, even more important than airbags.

The research was done by AAA and University of Florida's National Older Driver Research and Training Center (NODRTC). People over 65 are the fastest growing population segment (one more reason Social Security is in trouble): 37 million over 65, 29 million with licenses. By 2020, there will be 40 million licensed drivers 65 and over. For more information, check out www.aaa.com/seniors.

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