

# The Getting Around Guide

*An AARP Guide to Walking, Bicycling and Public Transportation*



**AARP**<sup>®</sup>



# Imagine getting around your community, safely and easily, **without a car.**

For many people, hopping in the car is so automatic they forget about cheaper, healthier, and more enjoyable transportation alternatives, or don't know how to find them in their neighborhoods. This booklet will help you take advantage of the many fun and healthy options available, whether you live in a small town, suburb, or big city. It includes practical tips and advice on identifying these options and getting started using them.

There are many benefits of choosing to go “car-lite,” (alternating car trips with other modes of transportation), or car-free. Walking, bicycling, and using public transportation or other transportation services can help your wallet, health, and community. Consider:

**Your costs:** Owning, operating, maintaining, and insuring a vehicle can be much more expensive than you think. According to the AAA, the average person spends \$9,641 per year on their car not including parking costs. The savings from walking, bicycling, or using public transportation can be substantial, when you consider the above and the wear and tear on your vehicle.

**Your health:** We all know 30 minutes of physical activity each day will benefit most people. Walking or biking to the store, work, a friend’s home, or the bus stop are all ways to get needed exercise without it seeming like a chore.

**Your community:** By leaving the car at home, you’ll be helping reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, which benefits the environment, and ultimately everyone.

## **Assessing Your Options**

Cutting back on the time you spend in your car need not be a hardship. Think of it as a way to help yourself as well as your community. Even if you leave the car parked for some of your shorter trips, you will make a difference.

## A Word to Caregivers

Perhaps you play an important role in the life of a parent, sibling, or friend by driving them to medical appointments or the store. But sometimes you can't provide help when they need it. With a little homework, and by encouraging them to try different means of travel, you can help them stay—or become—more independent.

- Research your local transportation services, find out about bus and rail lines, ride-sharing programs, and taxi and van services, and then share this information. (See the section on Public Transportation and Other Transportation Options for help in finding services.)
- Help your care recipient try car-free options by accompanying them on the trip. Walk with them to the transit stop, and if it's their first time on the bus or subway, ride along to familiarize them with the service.

More information on caregiving can be found at [www.aarp.org/caregiving](http://www.aarp.org/caregiving).



## Walking

After driving, walking is the most popular means of travel in the United States. It's easy, cheap, and gentle on the body and environment.

It is recommended adults engage in physical exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, five or more times a week, to maintain and improve health. If you don't have 30 minutes to spare, break it up into shorter segments. Walking to the bus stop, train station, store or cleaners counts. The more you walk, the better you'll feel, and you'll be saving on gasoline and car maintenance.

While walking itself is not dangerous, there can be safety concerns. For too long, communities have been designed for motorists, with pedestrians an afterthought. For them, the results have been dangerous intersections, streets without sidewalks, and sidewalks too close to busy streets. Poor maintenance, inadequate lighting, or a lack of benches for resting or waiting for the bus or, in some areas, fear of crime may be a factor.

All of these can discourage people from walking regularly. There are, however, things you can do to make walking a regular, safe, and enjoyable part of your routine—and a real alternative to everyday driving.



## Getting Started

Getting “back on your feet” instead of in your car may be much easier than you think. Here are some simple steps:

- Consult your physician before beginning a new exercise routine. Start slowly, especially if you’re just starting to get back into shape, and build up your strength and endurance gradually.
- Take time to warm up or cool down and stretch before and after your walk.
- Invest in a well-fitting pair of shoes with solid support and good tread.
- Always carry a cell phone and identification.
- Consider using a walking stick for stability and remember to bring a bottle of water if you’re going far.
- Dress for the weather. Wear layers if it’s cold and choose loose, light-colored clothing when it’s hot. Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a hat and sunscreen.
- Purchase an inexpensive step counter (pedometer) to help you track your progress. Aim for 10,000 steps a day.

## Out and About

The best way to stay safe as a pedestrian is to be aware of your body and your surroundings. Here are some tips:

- Use sidewalks or paths when you can. If you must walk in the road or street, face oncoming traffic so you can see and be seen by approaching motorists.
- Wear bright-colored clothing to make yourself more visible and, if you walk at night, carry a flashlight, wear reflective clothing, choose well-lighted areas, and be alert. Turn off your music player if you use one.
- Pick an alternate route if the street is unsafe, avoid hazardous intersections, and obey traffic signs and signals.
- Keep hydrated by drinking water before and after your walk and consider taking a water bottle with you.

## Bicycling

Remember how fun riding your bike used to be? If you haven't been on a two-wheeler recently, it may be time to start again. Biking is a relatively inexpensive, healthy, and enjoyable way to get around.

Bicycling offers something for different fitness levels, needs, and interests. It's also a great family activity. Many communities have bike paths or wooded trails, and some have paths that connect with shopping areas, job sites, or transit stops. Even large cities are promoting bicycling by dedicating bike lanes on urban streets.

Biking is good for your body, too. A 150-pound person biking at a light to moderate pace (about 10 mph) can burn 200 calories or more in just 30 minutes. A low-impact aerobic activity that benefits your heart and lungs, bicycling also strengthens the legs and knees—an important consideration as we age.



## Getting Started

If you're feeling rusty, here are some helpful hints for getting back on a bike. And, if you're concerned about balance, consider an adult three-wheeler!

- Choose the right bike for you. For many older riders, a medium-weight mountain bike or a hybrid may be the most appropriate. Your local bike shop can help by making sure the frame is the proper size for your height and adjusting the seat and handlebars for your comfort and safety.
- Drink adequate water before your ride and take a water bottle with you. Biking can be strenuous, so know your limits and respect them.
- Always carry an ID and cell phone for emergencies.
- Dress for the weather and wear bright clothes to stay visible. Don't forget sunscreen and sunglasses, and be sure to tie up loose pant legs and tuck in shoelaces so they don't get entangled in the chain.
- Before heading out, perform a bike safety check. Make sure your tires are inflated to the proper pressure and the brakes are functioning.
- If you're going to ride far from home, tell someone where you plan to bike and be sure to carry a repair kit that includes a spare tube or patch – and know how to use it.
- **Always** wear your helmet, and make sure it fits properly for maximum safety. Consider taking a bike education class. For information on classes, bicycle safety, equipment and advocacy, visit the League of American Bicyclists website at [www.bikeleague.org/programs](http://www.bikeleague.org/programs).

## Out and About

Because you will be part of traffic when you ride, it is important to respect traffic rules and use defensive riding techniques:

- Obey traffic signals and local laws regarding bicycles. Ride on the right, with the flow of traffic, so motorists can see you. Look back frequently to monitor traffic behind you. A rear-view mirror may be helpful, but don't rely on it totally.
- Use hand signals when changing lanes. When approaching a right-turn-only lane, change lanes before the intersection. Look over your left shoulder before making a left-hand turn.
- Riding on the sidewalk can be dangerous, especially around intersections and driveways. If you must ride on sidewalks, stay alert and always yield to pedestrians.
- Keep a distance of at least 3 to 4 feet from parked cars. Someone could open a door or emerge suddenly from between vehicles.
- Motorists don't always signal or obey traffic signs, and they sometimes change their minds about where they're going. Making eye contact lets you know they're aware of you.
- Use lights on both the front and back of your bike at dusk or in the dark. Reflectors are not enough and only work if the motorist's headlights are shining right on you.



## Public Transportation and Other Transportation Options

In a 2006 AARP poll, 9 out of 10 people age 50+ said they want to remain in their home and community for as long as possible. Yet drivers age 70 and older are expected to outlive their driving years—men by 7 years and women by 10.<sup>1</sup> Knowing your transportation options, and being comfortable using them, can help you remain independent in your community as you age.

### Conserving Gas—and Your Cash

Using public transit isn't just easier on the environment, it's also easier on your wallet. Depending on where you live and how far you drive, the savings can total over \$10,000 a year, according to November 2009 figures assembled by the American Public Transportation Association. Savings will vary widely and will depend on how much you pay for gas, parking, and other driving expenses. To get an idea of how much you might save, try the calculator at [www.publictransportation.org/contact/stories/calculator\\_08.asp](http://www.publictransportation.org/contact/stories/calculator_08.asp).

<sup>1</sup>Daniel J. Foley, et. al, Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Aged 70 Years and Older in the United States, *American Journal of Public Health*, August 2002, Vol. 92, No. 8

## **Buses**

When you think of public transportation, buses may come to mind first. To meet the needs of riders of all ages, many buses now offer passenger-friendly features such as low floors, “kneeling” functions to ease entry, audio and visual bus stop announcements, and other improvements. In addition to regular fixed routes, many communities offer local shuttles, circulators, and buses that stop whenever a rider flags them along the route. Discounted rates are often available to older people and those with disabilities.

## **Vanpools and Ridesharing**

Vanpools and other ridesharing arrangements are not just for commuters going to and from work. Vans operated by local nonprofits or businesses may take you to shopping malls or doctor appointments. If you drive, consider giving a lift to a friend or neighbor. During rush hour, you may qualify to use a car pool or express lane and save time as well.





## How to Find Public Transportation and Other Transportation Options

It's not always easy to find out about the transportation options in your community. Resources to find them may include:

- Your local transit agency. Call or look up its website, which may have detailed information on routes, schedules, and fares. Your municipal government may have additional information. Many transit providers at the state and local levels are listed at [www.apta.com/resources/links](http://www.apta.com/resources/links).
- Also, many transit agencies provide special services for people with qualifying disabilities. To learn about eligibility, contact your local transit provider.
- Many states are setting up additional numbers for government services. Though not available everywhere, these numbers may help you find information about local transportation options:
  - » 211 (human services)
  - » 311 (government information and non-emergency services)
  - » 511 (travel information)
- Local faith-based organizations and other community groups may also be able to direct you to transit providers.

## Getting Started

- The easiest way to introduce yourself to a new way of travel is to go along with an experienced user. That way, you'll know what to do when you go it alone.
- Your local transit agency or senior center may offer an orientation for new riders. The AARP website at [www.aarp.org/ridethebus](http://www.aarp.org/ridethebus) has a detailed guide, with videos, for new bus riders.
- When using other transportation options, it doesn't have to be "either" the car "or" another way. Think about whether you can drive—or even walk or bike—to the bus stop or train station.
- For work commutes, ask if your employer subsidizes costs for transit. Frequent riders also can save money with monthly passes.

## We Need to Talk

At some point, most people will need to "retire" from driving, and it is often up to family members to raise this difficult subject. Knowing there are transportation alternatives can make the transition easier for the driver, who will likely feel a loss of independence once the option of driving is gone.

To help caregivers talk about driving with a loved one, The Hartford and the MIT AgeLab developed a brochure called We Need to Talk. Also available in some areas is a We Need to Talk seminar, developed by AARP. For more information about We Need to Talk, including seminars, brochures, and videos, go to [www.aarp.org/weneedtotalk](http://www.aarp.org/weneedtotalk).

## Special Transportation Options

Special transportation options, generally targeted toward people with limited mobility, are available in many areas. These services may include:

- Dial-a-ride or other transportation for people unable to use fixed-route services. Vans or mini-buses are typically used to take riders to a doctor's office or other destinations.
- Transportation programs sponsored or operated by nonprofit or faith-based organizations. These programs may employ volunteer drivers or work in conjunction with local governments.
- Taxis. In addition to regular taxi service, there may be voucher programs and other subsidies for those with limited mobility, as well as vehicles specifically designed for accessibility.

## Special Services for Older Adults

Various government agencies and nonprofit groups focus their services on older adults. They can be a convenient and valuable one-stop source of transportation information for travelers and caregivers alike. The Eldercare Locator at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov) or **1-800-677-1116** can help you find a local senior center or Office on Aging to learn what programs are available. Senior-oriented housing developments often have helpful resources such as a community bulletin board or newsletter as well.

It's important to know your options in case driving is not possible, either temporarily or for a longer period. Prepare for this possibility by exploring your options now, before you need to use them.

## More Solutions

If your area lacks facilities or services, consider becoming an advocate for improvements. Here are some ways to get involved:

### Walking and Biking

- **Walking:** Survey the “walkability” of your neighborhood, identifying safety hazards, lack of maintenance, and other issues that might discourage pedestrians or impede access to transit stops. Tally your results and share with authorities who can find real solutions. You’ll find a step-by-step guide in AARP’s Create The Good® “Sidewalks and Streets Survey” at [www.createthegood.org/howto](http://www.createthegood.org/howto).
- **Bicycling:** Scout locations for potential bike lanes, bicycle racks, and other features that would make biking safer and more convenient. Join forces with your local biking group or co-op to document the need for improvements. Your local bike store may help you make these connections.
- **The Alliance for Biking & Walking** includes most grassroots biking and walking organizations working to improve their communities. You’ll find helpful information and who you can connect with on their website at [www.peoplepoweredmovement.org](http://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org).

### Public Transportation and Other Transportation Options

- »Do you have concerns or complaints about existing service? If so, document them and then contact your local transit agency.
- »If transit service is lacking or nonexistent, contact your local government, elected officials, or local Office on Aging and share your thoughts about what is needed. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper. If you aren’t satisfied with the response, take your concerns to higher elected officials.

## Making Roads Work for All Users

- »More and more communities are embracing “walkability.” You can be a part of this effort and enlist others as well. One place to start is with a walking club. If there isn’t one in your community, start one. AARP’s Create The Good offers step-by-step details on how to identify local partners, build a team, and set goals. Visit [www.createthegood.org/howto](http://www.createthegood.org/howto) for more information.
- »AARP is part of the National Complete Streets Coalition, a movement to help ensure that roads and sidewalks work for all users—pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities—as well as for drivers. Complete Streets policies have been adopted in more than 100 communities across the country, often with the help of AARP volunteers. Consider becoming part of a local or state Complete Streets effort. Find out more at [www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org).



## Putting It All Together

Now that you know your options for getting around without your car, what's stopping you? Consider:

- Going car-free is a choice millions of people make every day, whether or not they have a driver's license.
- When taking the bus, exit a stop or two early and walk the rest of the way. Or ride your bike to the bus and load it on the rack to finish your trip.
- Go “car-lite” and alternate car trips with other modes of transportation. In two-car households, using transportation options may allow you to keep one car and sell the other—or sell both cars and rent one when needed. You can also try convenient car-sharing services that allow you to use a car for short periods when you need it most.
- To stay safe while driving, check out the AARP Driver Safety Program at [www.aarp.org/drive](http://www.aarp.org/drive). This online or classroom program will help you become aware of changes in your driving abilities as you age and may qualify you for an insurance discount.
- For those times when you do drive, it's important your car is configured to your needs. CarFit, a program that AARP helped develop, offers a 12-point checklist to help you see how well your car “fits” you for proper seating, clear sight lines, and more. For more information about CarFit, including videos, go to [www.aarp.org/carfit](http://www.aarp.org/carfit).
- Most important of all, have a backup plan in case driving is not possible, either temporarily or long term, or if family members or neighbors are unavailable to drive you. Try a new way of getting around now, before you need to. You might find you like it better than driving!

Share your thoughts on getting around by walking, biking, or taking public transportation. How do you get around? How would you like to get around? What obstacles do you face? Tell us about it at [gettingaround@aarp.org](mailto:gettingaround@aarp.org).



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