



Aging Gracefully
FLYING SAFELY!

**Aging Factors,
Effects on Flying
Activities, and
Coping Strategies**

*Don't Deny Your Limitations
Acknowledge and Work with Them*

Condition or Function	Effect on Flying	Coping Strategy
<p>Vision – cataracts and other progressive conditions (age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, presbyopia) causing reduced acuity, trouble focusing, diminished ability to discern colors, loss of visual field</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● difficulty reading airport signs, panel instruments, and charts ● loss of peripheral clues on landing ● inability to identify light signals ● some conditions may be medically disqualifying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● operate in well lighted environments ● consult eye care specialist annually for updated evaluation and Rx ● consider medical/surgical corrective options where appropriate (consult AOPA, EAA, or Aviation Medical Examiner for FAA approved procedures)
<p>Vision – diminished contrast sensitivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● difficulty spotting traffic in the air or objects on the surface, especially in haze or low light (dusk, night) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● operate in well lighted environments ● fly with competent companion
<p>Vision – diminished depth perception and reduced peripheral vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● difficulty judging height and distance, especially during landing resulting in bounced or dropped-in landings ● difficulty seeing overhead placards or controls ● difficulty judging distance to other aircraft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● increase scanning and verify appropriate runway focus points ● work with instructor to develop new or improved scanning skills ● adjust seat height ● work with eye care specialist to assure optimum corrective lenses and fitting
<p>Vision – reduced night vision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● inability to read charts at night ● difficulty recovering from bright lights or glare, especially during taxi, takeoff and landing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● avoid night operations especially if wet and/or moonless ● keep windscreen clean and streak-free to reduce glare
<p>Hearing – reduced auditory discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● difficulty understanding speech, especially in noisy environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maintain good-quality, noise-free radios ● use high-quality conventional or noise canceling headsets

Condition or Function	Effect on Flying	Coping Strategy
<p>Cognition – reduced sensory perception, diminished short-term memory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● may fail to recognize initial clues that signal potential trouble ● easily overloaded with sensory inputs ● may forget specific items when given multiple instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fly in familiar environments ● avoid congested airspace ● acquire training before undertaking new or unfamiliar tasks ● avoid distractions
<p>Cognition – slower mental processing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● more easily overwhelmed by in-flight calculations, navigation, or piloting tasks ● more easily confused by lengthy clearances or complex controller instructions ● difficulty understanding new or unexpected situations ● task shedding when overwhelmed – losing focus on the most important tasks, particularly when those tasks are complex or demanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● avoid complex airspace ● take time for more thorough preflight planning including walk-through of flight ● anticipate situations and think through alternatives ahead of time ● practice frequently with your GPS or other equipment ● fly with an instructor in new or complex situations
<p>Cognition – slower reflexes, diminished performance, context dissonance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reduced ability to perform accurate, precise, and timely control inputs, especially during takeoff and landing ● executing counter-intuitive actions such as saying (or knowing) one thing and doing another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fly frequently to stay as proficient as possible ● participate in regular on-going recurrent training (WINGS knowledge and flight) ● reduce crosswind and other personal minimums to match your changing abilities ● follow checklists and standard operating procedures, don't improvise ● use superior judgment to compensate for diminished abilities

Condition or Function	Effect on Flying	Coping Strategy
<p>Cognition – reduced mental stamina, easily fatigued mentally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reduction in ability to perceive, process, and perform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● read books, engage in challenging discussion with friends and colleagues, take courses, acquire new knowledge ● learn a new skill or hobby, solve problems, stay mentally active – use it or lose it! ● maintain healthy diet and engage in regular cardiovascular exercise ● get adequate rest
<p>Physiology – reduced strength, stamina, endurance, dexterity, and mobility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● inability to accurately and rapidly apply control inputs ● inability to apply full control inputs ● reduced endurance ● increased susceptibility to hypoxia ● decreased ability to enter or exit the aircraft ● decreased ability to move and secure aircraft on the ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● participate in health and wellness program in consultation with your physician ● get regular exercise ● maintain adequate nutrition and hydration ● get adequate rest ● recognize changing limitations and adjust personal minimums accordingly
<p>External Factors – emotional distractions (family, finance) and pharmaceutical effects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reduction in mental focus ● diminished ability to perceive, process, and perform ● possible disorientation due to food/drug interactions, particularly with altitude ● some medications may be disqualifying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maintain connection with family, friends, and pilot community ● participate in social activities ● seek help from family, friends, spiritual advisors, and/or health care professionals when necessary ● understand your medications ● know possible interactions between foods and herbal supplements ● know how altitude affects medications and supplements