



Heart, Strength, Flexibility & Movement

On the Water 65Plus

Heart conditions become more common with age, as the heart becomes more vulnerable to sudden shocks or heavy exertion, such as if you fall in cold water, or need to paddle or row against a strong current. Always consider the risks of sudden stress or exhaustion, and wear a lifejacket – it will greatly help you manage the ‘cold shock’ if you fall in and buy you time to self-recover or wait for assistance. Take care around your vessel or on smaller craft such as tenders (especially with balance on a moving boat) and keep a careful eye on weather conditions.

Strength, flexibility, balance and movement

Muscle strength, flexibility and movement are needed to turn the steering wheel, tiller or helm, manage sails, or to operate a paddle or oars. They are also needed for keeping balance on a moving vessel. Muscle strength is vital in an emergency, such as falling overboard. It can be very difficult to re-board a vessel from the water. It is important to always wear a lifejacket, and make sure your boat has a means of re-boarding in an emergency that works for you. Swim ladders, for example, need to be strong and stable, and need to extend well down into the water.

Boating is a good way to maintain regular exercise that reduces the decline in muscle mass that is common with age. If some tasks are becoming more difficult on your boat, bring along family or friends to help. You might consider choosing a boat that has features such as wheel steering (versus or tiller), a furling headsail and/ or an electric anchor winch. You may also look at swapping a mooring to a berth at a marina or a marina mooring with a tender service to minimise the effort required to get on and off your boat. If your boating routine is easy, you are more likely to go boating more often, and keep boating for longer.

Medications

Medications help many people maintain good health and quality of life. However, some prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs can affect our coordination, mental alertness, mood and behaviour.

When boating or using a watercraft, medications can affect our perception of hazards, balance, reduce reaction times and impair decision-making skills.

If you take prescription or over-the-counter drugs, talk to your pharmacist or doctor for advice on any possible effects on your boating. Always check the labels on medications if you are taking them, especially if operating a vessel or watercraft.

Medical conditions that affect driving

If you have a licence to drive a powerboat, you must inform Roads and Maritime if you have any medical conditions that could affect your ability to drive safely.

Reporting your condition does not mean you have to give up your licence. Roads and Maritime may request you visit your doctor to assess your fitness to drive a powered vessel. During the appointment, talk to your doctor about your boating needs. You may qualify for a conditional licence that allows you to continue driving if you undergo periodic medical assessments.

More information about licensing options and requirements for older drivers is available at www.rms.gov.au