Not Yet!

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We Americans are too eager to put off important medical testing out of fear.

Because of multiple sclerosis, my walking was getting worse each year. So was my driving. Warm or humid weather made my legs weak; accelerating and braking became more difficult.

I avoided driving, depending on others to take me places. But I felt too young to stop driving altogether. My sister, Judy, encouraged me to take the plunge and switch to driving with hand controls. This meant surrendering my standard driver's license for a restricted license. Finally, I committed to starting the process. I contacted the state of Ohio's rehab office, and a vocational rehabilitation counselor worked with me on a vehicle modification plan and driving lessons.

The journey wasn't easy. Learning to use hand controls to turn, brake and accelerate was a new set of skills made more difficult when seated next to a state employee. I was stressed, depressed and overwhelmed. I had been driving since I was 16 and now, 40 years later, I was starting over.

I realize now that my anxiety was not about learning new driving skills, but about my loss of a "normal" driver's license.

Why Do We Wait?

I waited because this new way of driving meant acknowledging that I was getting worse. I felt that the more I appeared disabled, the more I would be left out.

We might put things off because we are overwhelmed, lazy or afraid of failing. A Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey found that 37 percent of Americans say they have postponed medical changes to save money.

Dr. Ian Clarke, founder of a joint-replacement laboratory at Loma Linda University, says most patients delay hip replacements for perceptual reasons: fear of the unknown, fear of surgery, fear of the post-surgery pain and fear that they may end up worse off than before they started.

It's About Losses

We might delay a medical change to avoid a loss. After a surgery, we might lose some strength. Moving to assisted living means losing our homes. Giving up a driver's license means a loss of independence.

We have no control over some losses. We can only be honest about it, acknowledge it and move on. The words from Matthew 6:25-26 touch on this: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. ... Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they?"

After the feared medical procedures are over, people express a common reaction: "If I only knew then what I know now, I would have done it years ago."

As for me, I now make left-hand turns and park on a dime with my hand-controlled van. I can make that grocery-store run or meet friends for lunch. It required crossing over to a new reality. What a grace that I didn't wait forever! A

Handy Tips

- Start with a first step: See a doctor, a real estate agent, etc. Do a little at a time.
- Remember that the surgery, therapy, move or change will end in a matter of weeks or months.
- Visualize how much better off you will be when the process is over!

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