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## NTDB™ data points

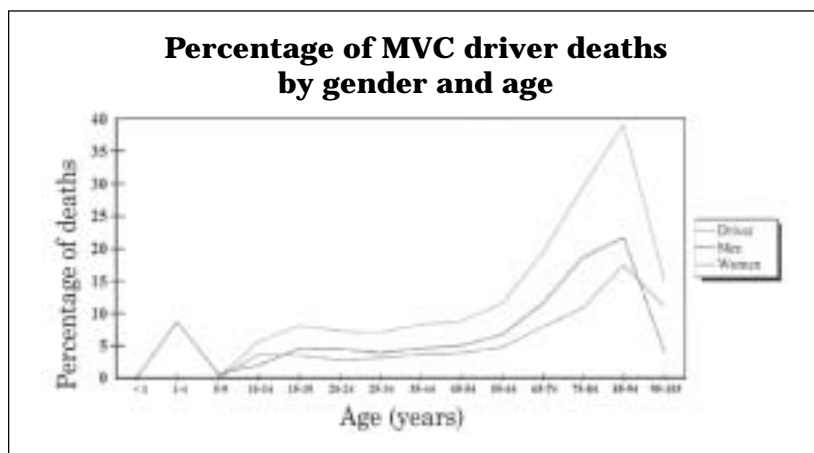
# To drive or not to drive?

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As a follow-up to last month's focus on the beginning of the driving experience, we will now take a look at the other end of the spectrum. It is to no one's surprise that with the maturing of the baby boomers our population is aging at a rapid rate. Over the next 25 years it is estimated that elderly drivers will account for almost 20 percent of all miles driven, which represents nearly a threefold increase from 1990.

Through self-recognition elderly drivers may have already reduced the duration of their drives, avoided busy highways, used a conservative approach to speed limits, and restricted their driving time to daylight hours. These types of driving style modifications come as part of their more than 50 years of practical, behind-the-wheel training and experience. Driving a motor vehicle may be one of the last forms of independence our elderly population has to hold on to.

We must recognize, however, that with aging comes impaired hearing, slower reflexes, and use of prescription medications that may reduce reaction time. It is not uncommon to hear about an elderly driver who has gone off-road and injured pedestrians. Elderly drivers are also more likely to be involved in multi-vehicle crashes.



Percentage of driver deaths due to motor vehicle crashes for both men and women at each age range from 0 to 105 (percentage of deaths = number of deaths divided by the number of patients  $\times$  100 for MVC drivers by gender and age range).

The most striking concern about elderly drivers is depicted in the graph above. When looking at the percentage of motor vehicle driver deaths by age and gender contained in the National Trauma Data Bank™ (NTDB), there is a dramatic peak after age 75. It becomes a matter of life and death as one in five drivers involved in a motor vehicle crash in this age range dies.

Advising the elderly on driving and, more importantly, when it is time to hang up the car keys is not an easy task. Stripping them of their last bit of independence is hard for professionals and family members alike. These

data, however, support this counseling activity as a prevention measure, given the significant injury-associated mortality with driving in this age group.

Throughout the year we will be highlighting these data through brief reports that will be found monthly in the *Bulletin*. For a complete copy of the National Trauma Data Bank *Annual Report 2002*, visit us on the Web at <http://www.facs.org/dept/trauma/ntdbannualreport2002.pdf>. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at [mneal@facs.org](mailto:mneal@facs.org).