



Your Health Advocacy and Information Newsletter

Cell Phones and Driving: A Dangerous Duo

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We live in a busy, busy world. It seems like we try to do it all. This has led us to all be pretty good at multi-tasking. But is it always a good thing? There are 270 million cell phone users in the U.S. and 80 percent of them talk on the phone while driving.

According to different studies, talking on a cell phone (whether handheld or hands free) is considered the equivalent to driving while intoxicated. Dialing numbers, receiving calls, and holding conversations on cell phones while driving eats away at the concentration required of motorists. Beyond the tragic fatalities caused by drivers distracted by cell phones, scientific studies have established correlations between cell phone usage and accidents. When we turn the “listening knobs” up, says psychologist Steve Yantis of Johns Hopkins University, we turn the “visual knobs” down.

“People definitely are optimized for handling multiple tasks,” says Yantis, who has spent years studying how we control the flow of information into our brains, and what we do with is when we’ve got it. “We’ve evolved to be effective multi-taskers because it’s useful to be able to do multiple things at once to be able to survive. But there are limitations.”

Yantis and his team of researchers have been using one of the most effective tools in the field of cognitive science, functional magnetic resonance imaging, to look inside the brains of their subjects during various experiments. Different parts of the brain literally light up, showing such things as increased blood flow, when the subjects are given different tasks.

The evidence shows clearly that when the participants concentrated on listening, the part of the brain that controls vision became less active, and vice versa. It’s as though we have a certain amount of gray matter, and if we’re going to put a lot of it in our listening basket, we’re going to have to take it from somewhere else.

Among research findings:

- Over half of U.S. drivers report having used a cell phone while driving.
- 7 out of 10 admit to text messaging while driving.
- Young drivers were overwhelmingly more likely to text message, and somewhat more likely to talk on cell phones while driving, than older drivers.
- Males with higher education are more likely to talk while driving.
- You are 3 times more likely to get into an accident if you are dialing a phone.
- Text messaging while driving increases the risk of accidents by 23 times.
- The risk of an accident was nearly five times higher than normal when a person was on the phone one to five minutes before an accident.
- The collision rate was four times higher when the call was made less than 15 minutes before the accident.
- 8 in 10 drivers support some type of cell phone usage restriction.
- 25% of all traffic accidents are a result of distracted drivers.
- At any given time, there are almost 1 million drivers on the road using a cell phone.
- 6 states in the U.S. currently ban cell phones behind the wheel, 23 do not, 18 have a partial ban, and 3 states are debating the issue.



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