

#8 IN A SERIES

DEADLY DISTRACTIONS

Tips for keeping your mind on the road.



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Driver distractions

or inattentive driving play a part in one out of every four motor vehicle crashes. That's more than one-and-a-half million collisions a year — more than 4,300 crashes every day!

Distractions Are Everywhere

The list of driver distractions that contributes to crashes and injuries is long. But here's the bottom line: driving is a serious responsibility; it demands and deserves your full, undivided attention.

What is a distraction? It's anything that takes your hands, eyes or attention away from driving. It could be a billboard, passengers in your car, something going on outside your car or even



something as simple as trying to set the speed of your windshield wipers. Of course, you have to occasionally glance at your speedometer, fuel and other gauges. But actions like changing the radio station, dialing a cell phone, reading a map or using a navigation system while you're driving can lead to big trouble. In fact, one recent study showed that driver distractions are a contributing

factor in more than 4,300 crashes a day. Among the most common driving distractions are:

- Adjusting the radio, cassette or CD player
- Other occupants in the vehicle
- Moving objects in the vehicle
- Using/dialing a wireless phone
- Eating and drinking while driving
- Personal grooming
- Adjusting the vehicle's temperature controls
- Smoking while driving
- Outside distractions, including:
 - Accidents
 - Vehicles stopped by police
 - Friends in other vehicles
 - Roadside advertising
 - New construction (shops, restaurants, etc.)

Our goal is to help you recognize driver distractions and give you tips on how you can avoid falling victim to them.

Mobile Phones – Dialing for Disaster

Can't imagine life without your cell phone? They're an important part of everyday life, but using a wireless phone while driving increases your chance of getting into an accident by 400 percent.

When you're searching for a number, dialing or talking, you're not watching the road like you



should. “Hands-free” phone features help, but they can't prevent you from becoming involved in a conversation and losing concentration.

A survey of 837 drivers with cell phones found that almost half swerved or drifted into another lane, 23% had tailgated, 21% cut someone off and 18% nearly hit another vehicle while using the phone.

So what can you do? How can you be a safe driver if you absolutely have to use your phone while traveling? Wireless phone manufacturers suggest a number of good options:

- Pull off the road and stop in a safe place before using your phone.
- When the phone rings, let it ring! It's better to use your phone's voicemail or even miss a call than to put yourself, your passengers or others at risk.
- Become very familiar with your phone before using it on the road.

- Never take notes or jot down numbers while driving.

Remember: driving safely is always more important than using the phone.

Dashboard Dining – A Crash Diet

From breakfast burritos to burgers and fries, eating on the run has turned into an everyday part of our lives. Who hasn't done it? French fries on your lap, a drink in one hand and a sandwich in the other while your knees do the steering. Eating while driving is not only dangerous, it's messy, and fumbling with napkins, condiments, wrappers and beverages means

you're not watching the road.

Here are a few ways you can concentrate more on the road than on your burger:

- Leave a little early. Allow yourself time to stop for a bite to eat.
- If you're traveling with someone, take turns driving and eating.

Turning Knobs Means Turning Your Head

Radio station buttons, CD and cassette controls, volume, balance and fade, A/C and heat knobs, fan speed, cruise control...

Those are just some of the knobs, switches, buttons and controls you can adjust, switch on or off and



turn up and down while driving, and they all help make travel more comfortable and more fun.

You may think all the adjusting and changing is routine – after all, you’ve been doing it since you got your license. But inserting a CD or searching for a radio station makes you six times more likely to get into an accident than glancing at the fuel gauge or speedometer.

Don’t Let Technology Take a Toll

Some technology – like anti-lock brakes and traction control – has helped make driving safer. Other new technology, though, can cause you to take your mind and your eyes off the road.

There’s a whole new generation of in-car electronic gadgets – called “telematics” – designed to make life in the car more convenient and more comfortable. Wireless phones, alphanumeric pagers and other “messaging” devices, mobile Internet and hand-held computers all fall into this category, and many newer cars even have on-board navigation and night-vision systems.

But as communication and navigation technology becomes more and more common in vehicles, companies and even local and state governments are taking steps to increase safety. Some systems cannot be programmed while the vehicle is in motion. Voice-activated systems are being developed. And new laws are being considered in many places to limit what devices may be used while driving.

Think about it; let’s say you’re going 60 miles per hour. If you look down for just two seconds to choose a CD or adjust the climate controls, you’ll have traveled 176 feet blindly. That’s more than half the length of a football field. Try these tips to help keep your attention on the road:

- Ask your passenger to adjust the radio or climate controls for you.
- Take advantage of normal stops to adjust controls.
- With more complex devices – GPS/navigation systems, etc. – take the time to stop in a safe place before giving them your attention.

Children, Pets and Passengers

It’s hard enough concentrating on the road without the distraction of children, pets and passengers, and adding in just one of those factors can make driving dangerous. But there are ways you can avoid driving distractions within your own vehicle:

- Be sure children are properly and safely buckled up, and give them books, games or other items to occupy their time.
- Use a pet carrier or portable kennel to limit a pet’s ability to roam.
- Avoid arguments and minimize distracting conversations while driving.

External Distractions – Looks Can Kill

It's just human nature – the urge to “get a good look” at the scene of an accident or at cars that have been stopped by police can be almost overwhelming. And who can resist a long look at what they're putting in at the new shopping center? **The best advice: Don't do it!** Those things are never more important than staying focused on driving.

Remember, letting your concentration be diverted by these common driving distractions can be deadly:

- Roadside activities such as

accidents or vehicles stopped by police

- Friends in other vehicles
- Roadside advertising
- Construction areas
- Scenic views

Other Dangerous Driving Distractions

As you know there are all kinds of other distractions that take your attention away from driving. How many times have you seen people putting on make-up, styling their hair or shaving while driving? How about people reading maps or directions, a newspaper or even a book? And we all know smoking is





hazardous enough, but lighting up, putting out cigarettes or dealing with falling ashes while driving can be deadly.

The safe solution is simple – never do any of these things while you're driving.

This booklet was written with assistance from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, the Federal Highway Administration and the National Safety Council. Because every situation is different, the individual driver must decide what to do in each particular scenario. For further information, visit our partners' websites at www.nhtsa.dot.gov, www.aaafoundation.org, www.fhwa.dot.gov and www.nsc.org.

How To Keep Your Concentration

Are you always prepared to avoid a car swerving in front of you? How about braking for a pedestrian who suddenly steps into your path? Can you steer safely clear of debris falling from a truck?

Stay focused. Pay attention. Expect the unexpected. And follow these simple tips to help you – and others – stay alive:

- Always be sure you and your passengers are properly buckled up.
- Get plenty of sleep; never drive while drowsy.
- Avoid aggressive drivers.
- Do not tailgate.
- Allow sufficient time to reach your destination.



Distractions and Young Drivers

Car crashes are the number one killer of teenagers in America – more than 5,000 teens die each year. Inexperience, risk-taking and driver distractions are some reasons why.

Loud music, changing discs and tapes as well as tuning the radio are also potentially deadly distractions when behind the wheel. And when a teen driver has friends in the car, the risk is even higher – the more passengers, the greater the chance of a serious crash. Here are other common teen driver distractions

that can be deadly:

- Friends in other vehicles. Don't let saying "hi" or other fun and games take your attention off the road. Never try to pass items from one moving vehicle to another.
- Headphones. Hearing what's going on around you is just as important as seeing. In most states it's illegal to wear headphones while driving.
- The "show-off" factor. It may be tempting to go faster, turn sharper or beat another car through an intersection. But don't do it. Keep focused on staying safe and staying alive.

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