



U.S. Public Health Service Nursing

TIP OF THE MONTH

Distracted Driving

July 2018

MENTAL DISTRACTION RATING SYSTEM

Even with your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel, mental distractions dangerously affect drivers behind the wheel.



As the summer travel season is getting underway, many of us are planning more time in the car. This is the ideal time to bring attention to an increasing threat...distracted driving. Distracted driving occurs when the driver participates in any activity that takes their attention away from the road. This can include (but is not limited to) texting, checking phones, talking with passengers or changing the radio station. Unfortunately, this is not only a danger during the summer, but anytime we are on the road whether we are driving or as a passenger in the car throughout the year.

[Distracted driving is the number one cause of workplace death.](#) The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports 3,450 people were killed in 2016 by distracted driving and in 2015 over 390,000 accidents are attributed to distracted driving.

Please click here for further [distracted driving statistics.](#)

Types of Distractions:

- Visual– anything that would cause the driver to take their eyes off the road
- Manual– anything that would cause the driver to take their hands off the steering wheel
- Cognitive– anything that would cause the driver to take their mind off of driving

Tips to Avoid Distracted driving:

- Put your phone away or turn it off when you are driving and use it for emergencies only. It is okay to wait and answer a text or phone call once you get to your destination or to a place where you can safely pull over. USAA and AT&T have teamed up to support the [It Can Wait Campaign.](#) Since answering texts or taking calls for work while driving is dangerous, talk with your employer about implementing a [distracted driver policy](#) for your department. It is also helpful for those who are not driving. Try not to call or text your family and friends when you know they are driving.
- Don't multitask while you are driving. Finish grooming (applying makeup or doing hair) and eating while at home or before getting into a vehicle. The distractions that these activities provide are not worth the risk to yourself or others who are sharing the road with you. Studies have shown that a driver makes about 160 driving decisions in a mile. When multitasking, the driver's full attention is not on driving and this can affect their ability to make driving decisions quickly.
- If you are tired, pull off the road. [In 2014, 814 drivers were killed by falling asleep behind the wheel.](#) Driving drowsy is like driving intoxicated. Drivers have slower reaction times and impaired decision making abilities.
- Adjust your seat, mirrors and set your radio station prior to starting the car. Plan your route before you go and program the GPS prior to starting towards your destination. Attempting to adjust any of these during your commute can distract you from what is happening on the road.
- Store items that are loose in your vehicle and could potentially roll around that could distract you during your driving. This includes ensuring pets stay secured in the area of the car that is safest for them (which is not behind the wheel with the driver). Avoid reaching for items that are not secure until you can safely pull over. Securing items also prevents them from becoming projectiles in the event of an accident.
- Keep your eyes on the road. Don't become distracted by passengers, sightseeing or rubbernecking.

For further recommendations please visit [AAA](#) and [Traveler's.com](#)

Avoiding the dangers of distracted driving is everyone's responsibility, whether you are the driver or passenger. As a passenger, try to support the driver by answering the phone, changing the radio station if requested or monitoring the GPS and not distracting the driver with conversation. When you are in vehicle with someone else and you see the driver reaching for the phone or being distracted otherwise, speak up and let them know that you are not comfortable.

Accidents and deaths that occur as a result of distracted driving are preventable. Being a good example and advocating for the implementation of practices that decrease incidences of distracted driving can save lives.

Sources: https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted_driving/index.html, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>

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TO REQUEST A MENTOR

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