

Distracted Driving Best Practice Guide

Distracted Driving

Driving is a skill that requires concentration, alertness, and attention. The road environment can change in an instant, and in order to react safely, you need to be fully aware of what is happening around you at all times.

Distractions are a part of the Triple Threat — along with Speeding and Fatigue— and increase your risk of a serious collision. Driving while distracted is irresponsible and extremely dangerous — and the consequences of distracted driving can be devastating. Millions of collisions occur annually due to distracted driving, many of them resulting in serious injury and lost lives.

Although most drivers think they are able to multitask, the brain is only able to focus on one task at a time. In fact, it takes the brain up to 27 seconds to refocus on a task after a single distraction.

To be a safe driver, it is important to reduce distractions while driving and learn how to handle common hazards to stay safe and minimise collision risks.



Speeding

+



Distraction

+



Fatigue

=

**THE
TRIPLE
THREAT**

Dangers of Distraction

Driving 25 mph / 40 km/h during 27 seconds of inattention is the equivalent to travelling three football pitches.

Approximately 80% of collisions occur within three seconds of driver inattention because the brain is not able to quickly switch between tasks.

Drivers using phones are approximately four times more likely to be involved in a collision than drivers not using a phone.

The three main types of distraction:

VISUAL takes your eyes off the road

COGNITIVE takes your mind off the road

MANUAL takes your hands off the controls

Common Distractions:

- Responding to phone calls and messages
- Interacting with passengers, including children
- Adjusting GPS directions
- Adjusting auxiliary and climate controls
- Adjusting lights and mirrors
- Eating or drinking
- Reaching for an object inside the vehicle



Seven Stages of Distraction

Distracted driving has contributed to a surge in road fatalities and injuries over the last few years. To help drivers confront common denials about distractions, renowned psychology professor and eDriving advisor [Dr. Paul Atchley](#) has identified seven stages of distraction.



Stage 1: Ignoring Reality

Most drivers start with the mindset that they are better than most drivers and ignore any risky behaviours they may display.

Stage 2: The Myth of Multitasking

Next, we believe we can multitask while driving. We mistakenly think that we can switch back and forth between tasks while maintaining our focus; however, our brains are not meant to multitask.

Stage 3: Texting While Driving

Some drivers think it is safe to text while they are stopped at red lights or while stuck in traffic. However, a good defensive driver will always maintain situational awareness, even when their vehicle is not in motion.

Stage 4: The Lure of Hands-Free

Drivers also think that hands-free calls and texts are safe, but your brain cannot fully focus on the road while your mind is engaged in a phone conversation. In fact, statistics show that there is virtually no difference between a regular phone call and a hands-free phone call while driving.

Stage 5: New Technology

Drivers also may mistakenly believe that their vehicle's technology will make them safer, yet many times, in-vehicle systems — such as built-in entertainment, communication, and navigational systems — can take a driver's attention from the road.

Stage 6: Productivity Anxiety

Some drivers think that productivity through multitasking is worth the risk. Yet, studies show that waiting until you arrive at your destination before you focus on your task actually increases your productivity.

Stage 7: Accepting the Facts

The final stage is when drivers accept the fact that eliminating distractions while driving is the only safe choice.

Avoiding Distractions

Focus

When driving, you should look for potential hazards and traffic conditions 10-12 seconds ahead of your vehicle. Within this distance, you should be scanning what is happening both on and to the side of the road. You must not become fixated by any one part of the road scene or by events in your vehicle because this can prevent you from spotting other hazards that may develop into a more immediate threat. Continuously scan the area around your vehicle to get a full picture of what is happening around you. Use your mirrors and turn your head to clear your blind spots.

Avoid Eating and Drinking

Research has shown that drivers who eat or drink while driving are more likely to be involved in a collision because their attention is not on the road. Find a safe place to stop so you can eat and refresh before you resume your drive. Additionally, driving while hungry can make it hard to concentrate, so plan rest stops to eat and drink along your route, if needed. If you **MUST** drink during your trip, use a straw in a closed container so you do not have to take your eyes off the road.



Passenger Distractions

Carrying passengers can be very distracting for a driver, particularly if the passengers are children.

- Set expectations with younger passengers and pack activities to keep them occupied.
- Pull over in a safe space if you need to tend to babies or children.
- Avoid turning around while driving to converse with passengers in the back seat.
- Explain to passengers that it is dangerous to distract you while you are driving.
- Avoid heated discussions with passengers while travelling.

Plan Your Route

Program your GPS before your drive to familiarise yourself with your route. Check for traffic, weather, roadworks, and unfamiliar traffic patterns and plan rest stops, if necessary. If you need to adjust your route, do so beforehand to avoid the temptation to adjust while you are driving. In addition, prepare an alternate route so it is easy to pull to a safe spot and adjust your route to avoid hazards.

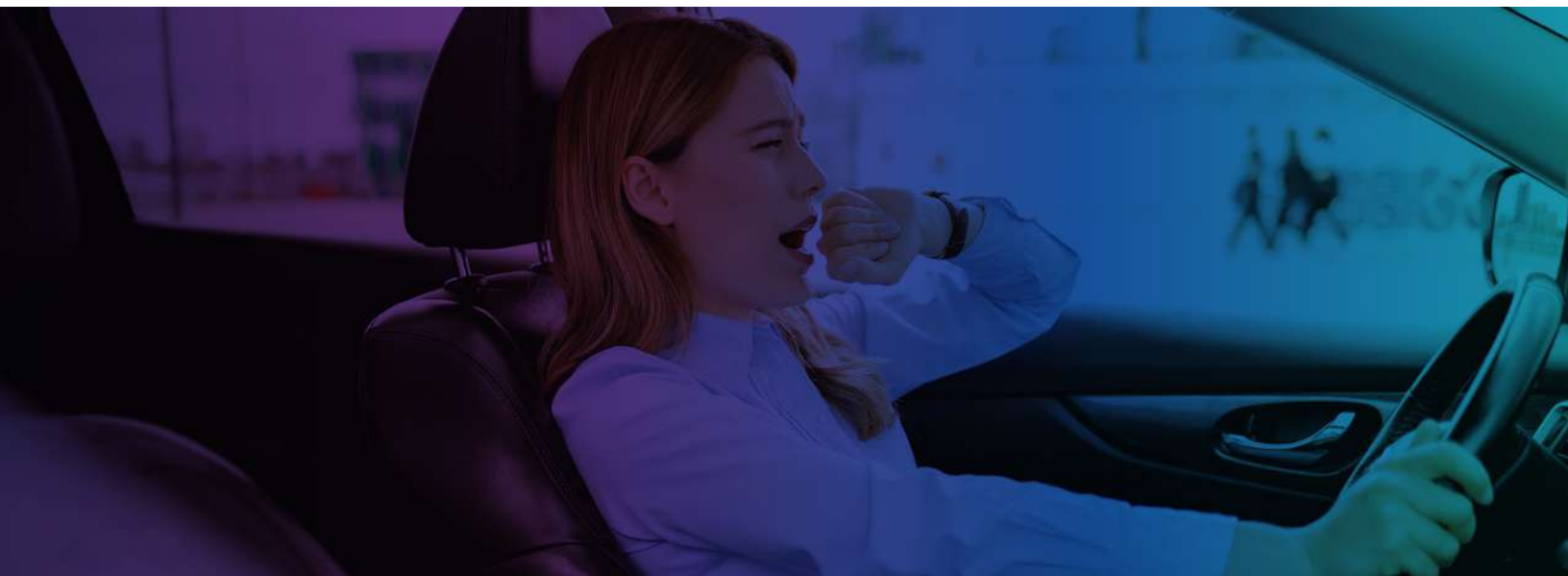
If you will be driving on monotonous roads, add in extra rest stops to refresh along the way. Make sure you position your seat correctly, adjust mirrors, and put on your seat belt before setting off on your journey. Set climate controls and auxiliary controls beforehand as well. Secure objects so they do not slide around and cause you to readjust them during your trip. Once you are on your way, you should be 100% focused on driving so make sure anything that could distract you is dealt with before you depart.

Listen To Your Body

If you are upset, stressed, or fatigued, you should not drive because your awareness of what is going on around you is likely to be affected. Drivers who are sleepy are more likely to be distracted. Most people need seven to nine hours of sleep each night, so make sure you are well-rested before your drive. To avoid fatigue during your trip, plan to stop for at least 15 minutes for every two hours of driving, or more often if you feel tired.

Don't Drive Impaired

Never drive impaired. Whether it be through alcohol, drugs, or medication, you should never drive if your full attention is not on the road. Check the side effects of any medication you are using before you drive. Designate a sober driver or use a ride-sharing app if you plan to drink or are too tired to drive.



Phone Use

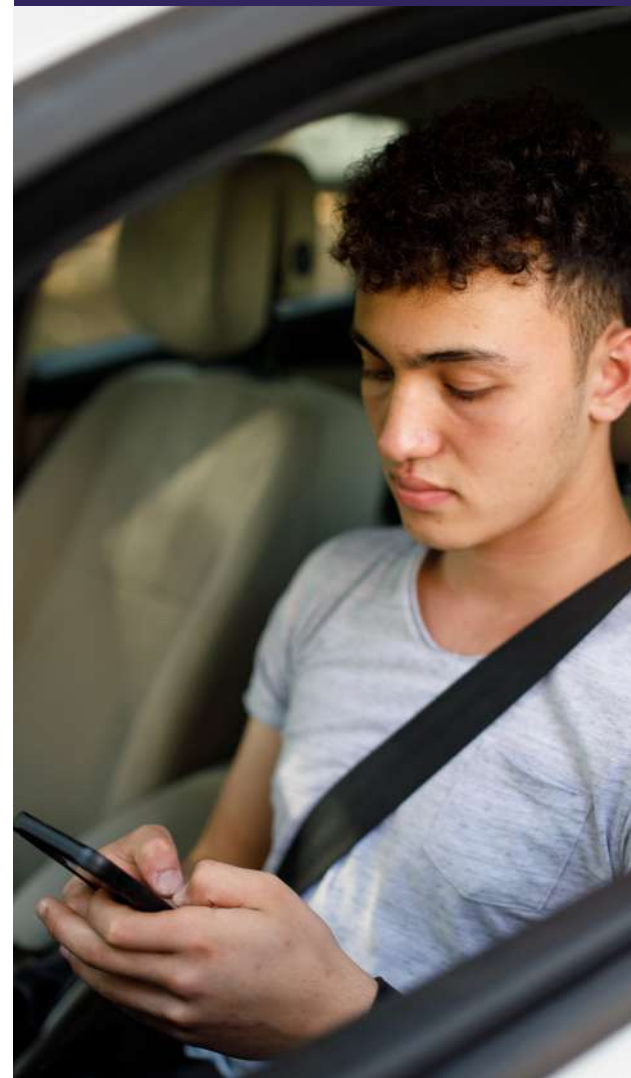
Phone Dangers

Phone distractions can be dangerous for yourself and other drivers as well as pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

Driving while using a phone, regardless of whether it is handheld or hands-free, is extremely dangerous and increases your risks in various ways:

- **Increased risk of collisions.** Inattention — including phone and in-vehicle distractions as well as fatigue — is responsible for 78% of collisions and 65% of near collisions.
- **Decreased awareness of what is happening around you.** According to the National Safety Council, drivers using a mobile phone look but fail to see up to 50% of the information in their driving environment.
- **Failure to see road signs and vulnerable road users.** Reading a text message while driving at 55 mph / 90 km/h could cause you to take your eyes off the road for five seconds, leading you to travel the length of an entire football pitch blind.
- **Failure to maintain a steady speed, a safe following distance, and a constant lane position.**
- **Increased reaction time.** Distractions can cause delayed reactions and increase the time it takes to spot and react to a sudden hazard, causing you to brake harshly to avoid a collision.
- **Increased risky behaviours.** Distracted drivers are more likely to enter unsafe gaps in traffic because they are not able to adequately assess hazards and associated risks.

Phones are one of the most dangerous distractions for drivers. Studies show that younger drivers are more likely to use their phones while driving, leading to higher collision rates for that age group.



Tips

1

Use your phone's Do Not Disturb function to let others know you will respond after your drive.

2

Set your GPS and audio controls before your trip. Include stops to rest and refuel or recharge your vehicle and share your location with loved ones, if applicable. Resist the urge to adjust vehicle controls until you are safely parked and away from traffic.

3

Stow your phone in a charging cradle or in a secure location before your drive.

4

Wait to respond to any calls or messages until after you are safely parked and away from traffic. Do not respond to calls, messages, or notifications while stopped in traffic and do not engage in stressful conversations while driving.

5

Never drive if you are unable to focus. Instead, postpone your drive until you are able to focus.

