

The top 7 causes of distracted driving and how to avoid them.



When we hear the words “distracted driving,” our mind conjures up a picture of a teen texting at the wheel or a businessman too absorbed in a sales call to keep his mind on the road. While cell phone use is one of the top causes of distracted driving crashes, it’s not the only one. Anything that takes your mind off the road or your hands off the wheel can put you and others at risk.

Distracted driving crashes result in over 3,000 deaths each year. Studies have found that the top distractions cited as the causes for these crashes are:

#7: Eating or drinking. Our lives are so busy that sometimes it seems easier to just grab a burger in the drive-thru line and eat on the road. The problem is, eating and drinking takes at least one hand off the wheel and your eyes off the road.

#6: Adjusting the car audio system, heating or cooling. Once again, this requires a few seconds with your eyes off the road – just enough time for that car in front of you to stop suddenly. The solution: take a few minutes before you begin driving to make sure you have the music and the temperature set the way you want it. Also check your mirrors, adjust your seat comfortably and enter your destination into your GPS device, if you are using one.

#5: Using or reaching for something brought into the vehicle. In 2013, an NFL player broke his arm in a crash when he tried to save the pizza on his

passenger seat from sliding to the floor. He missed seven games – making that one really expensive pizza. Any time you reach for something on the passenger seat (or worse, on the floor of your car) your eyes and attention are off the road. If you need the item that badly, pull off the road when it's safe to do so and retrieve it.

#4: Interacting with passengers. Some states limit the number of passengers newly licensed teen drivers can have in the car with them, and this is why: they can be very distracting, even for an experienced driver. Feel free to tell your passengers to keep it down and let you concentrate. You're giving them a ride, after all.

#3: Distractions outside the car. An accident pulled off to the side of the road, a hot air balloon, a billboard advertising a concert you'd love to see – there's a lot you could be looking at besides the other cars. Trust us: none of them are sights worth dying for.

#2: Cell phone use. Thanks to the versatility of smartphones, "cell phone use" encompasses a wide range of distractions: calling, receiving a call, texting, checking social media, etc. All are dangerous, but anything that requires you to type (texting, emailing, sharing a post) is a triple threat, keeping your hands, eyes AND mind off the road. Resist temptation by shutting off notifications and putting your phone in the armrest console or glove compartment. It can wait.

#1: Daydreaming, mind wandering. The #1 cause of distracted driving crashes is simply letting our minds wander from the task at hand. This is more likely to happen when:

- **You're in a rush.** If you're late, your mind will be occupied with the consequences – what your boss or friends will say when you show up, whether you will miss a flight or event, etc. Give yourself plenty of time to get where you're going, and you'll be in a more focused state of mind.
- **You're angry or frustrated.** If you've ever driven somewhere immediately after a heated argument, you know what we're talking about. Your mind will be replaying things you said or should have said, instead of focusing on the road. Cool down before you get behind the wheel.
- **You are sleepy.** It's obviously more difficult to focus on the road when you're fighting to stay awake. Avoid driving when you are drowsy.

With about 40,000 traffic deaths in the U.S. each year, driving is probably the most dangerous thing we do on a daily basis. When we give it the attention it deserves, everyone stays safer. (And a good driving record can save you money on auto insurance, too).