

SAFETY SIX: TEXTING WHILE WALKING

What you need to know

Changing the habits of a lifetime (or at least the last 10-15 years) isn't easy.

It usually takes a big wake-up call to stop dangerous activities, like smoking, tiger-bothering, or texting while walking.

You can make giving up easier by understanding and acknowledging the risks.

WHAT IS THIS FACTSHEET ABOUT?

Everyone knows walking while texting is dangerous.

Of course accidents can happen.

Doesn't stop us though, does it?

We either think it'll never happen to us.

Or we think the benefits (if you can call them that) outweigh the risks.

This factsheet is here to show you that, in fact, neither is true.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

The worksheet is for you, if you fulfil these criteria:

1. You walk, plan on walking, or otherwise intend to move in any direction, at any point in your life.
2. You now own, or in future could own, a mobile device.

Yes, we realise that's virtually everyone.

This is also useful for employers who want to keep their staff safe.

Yes, we realise that's virtually every employer (we hope).

WHAT ARE THE KEY INSIGHTS?

If you know what the real dangers of texting while walking are, you're more likely to think twice before you do it. Find out what they are.

Anecdotes are one thing, but you can't argue with stats. Discover the numbers behind the incidents to see that accidents really can, and do, happen to anyone.

Knowing where and when to be aware is half the battle. No sense worrying about texting while walking if your phone's on charge and you're sat down. Learn where most incidents take place so you can be extra vigilant.

Accidents aren't the only negative effect of texting and walking. See what could be happening every time you walk and text - not just the times you hit something.

It's all well and good saying you'll change now you know the risks. What you need is a plan. Plan what you're going to do in future to keep you safe.

YOU CAN WALK THE WALK, BUT CAN YOU TEXT THE TALK?

You're practically an expert at walking. You've been doing it for years now.

In chunks I mean, not non-stop.

Chances are you've been texting for a while now too. Prbly since ppl wer stil txtng like dis.

They're both hugely important to you.

So important, you can't pick just one.

You try to do them both at the same time.

But, for the most part, humans weren't built for that level of multi-tasking.

Something falls to the wayside.

Usually, it's looking where you're going.

Unless you have a guide dog, the results of that are going to be disastrous.

Ultimately, you need to pick one.

Texting?

Or walking?

TAKEAWAY

Realistically, texting and walking simultaneously isn't sustainable.

It's not making a handsfree call - your eyes actually need to be on the screen to text.

You can't have your eyes on the path in front of you and your phone at the same time.

"IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME"

You've got this far in life without a serious walking while texting incident. Sure, you've probably had a few near misses, but you're still here.

Everyone but the most worrisome fancies themselves immune.

But then, these accidents do happen. So not everyone can be right.

Let's look at some statistics.

Take the US. Between 2000 and 2011, there were more than 11,100 distracted walking accidents where a mobile was involved.

You could easily be one in eleven thousand.

Of those accidents, 80% were due to a fall. Ouch.

Not only does it hurt; you look daft.

There's not just falls though. It's anything.

Walking into dangerous areas. Walking into obstacles. Walking into traffic.

And it can happen anywhere.

In fact, of the accidents above, around 52% occurred in the home.

There are no safe zones when it comes to texting while walking.

Best to avoid it altogether.

TAKEAWAY

Distracted walking accidents can happen anytime, anywhere, to anyone.

And they happen more than you might think.

The only realistic defence is to not do it.

CAN YOU BEAR THE CONSEQUENCES OF TEXTING WHILST WALKING?

Accidents can happen if you walk when distracted. We've established that.

But what does that mean? A black eye and a bruised ego?

Or worse?

In 2012 in California, a man texting his boss while walking almost bumped into a bear that had wandered into his neighbourhood.

If you came face-to-face with Not-So-Gentle Ben, you'd give up the texting and walking pretty quickly.

More seriously, though - not everybody's so lucky.

In Hertfordshire in 2012, a 15-year-old girl was hit by a train on a level crossing. She was texting friends and listening to music.

As consequences go, this is pretty much as bad as it gets.

And it isn't just you they can affect.

It's everybody.

TAKEAWAY

Being gobbled up by Yogi might be an extreme example, but you can see how serious distracted walking accidents can be.

Do you really want to put yourself through that?

And not just you - everyone you know?

NO MORE CLOWNING AROUND

Accidents aren't the only downside of texting while walking.

Everyone's in such a rush nowadays. Probably why texting while walking seems attractive.

What if I told you texting whilst walking significantly slows your walking speed?

It's true. In a 2010 study, Russian experimenters examined walkers in a town square, and found that those who were distracted by phones took considerably longer to reach their destination.

They also had a lot more near-collisions.

So, you're not actually saving the time you think you are. Plus, you're more annoying to other pedestrians.

But that's not all.

You're missing out on everything going on around you.

The study placed a unicycling clown on the walking route.

Don't ask me where they found one.

Between distracted and undistracted walkers, those texting while walking were far less likely to even notice the clown.

If they're missing that, just think what you could be missing!

TAKEAWAY

You walk slower when you text at the same time. Told you - we're not great multi-taskers.

You also don't get to see your environment. Could be a new restaurant, the love of your life or, indeed, a clown on a unicycle.

Pocket your phone and experience your life!

HOW TO STOP SMS-ING UP

The first thing to do is to notice when you're about to get your phone out while walking.

And then: don't.

Every time you feel your hand go to your pocket, let that be the trigger for you to think.

"Is this text worth me being eaten by Baloo?"

If not, leave it.

If it is important - there's still no need to walk and text.

You can wait until you reach your destination.

Or, if it can't wait, find somewhere safe to stand or sit (or lie down, if you're so inclined). Then you can text to your heart's content.

You shouldn't even lose too much time, since texting while walking takes longer anyway.

Also, avoid entering long text conversations before walking, and you remove some of the temptation.

TAKEAWAY

Stop walking before you text. Easy change, right?

Changes like this aren't difficult to implement.

You just need to choose to do them.

And now that you know the dangers, you should.

FINAL SUMMARY

We know this sounds like babysitting, but it's really important, so we appreciate you having read this factsheet. We're not trying to teach you to suck eggs. You know not to text and walk.

Now, you've just got to make sure you put what you've learned into practice.

And think twice before you whop your phone out on your travels.