

People texting while walking more likely to have accidents, study confirms

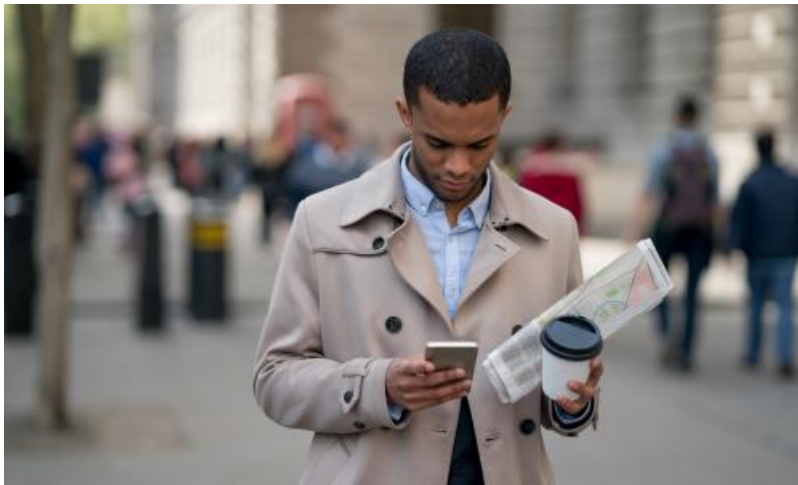
Publication Date: 2023-08-08

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Section: Technology

Tags: Mobile phones, news

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/aug/08/people-texting-while-walking-more-likely-to-have-accidents-study-finds>



In news that will come as a surprise to nobody who has walked down a busy street in the past 10 years, scientists have confirmed people texting while walking are more likely to have accidents. While previous studies have shown that texting pedestrians are more likely to walk into oncoming traffic, others have suggested young adults have mastered the art of multitasking and are able to text accurately while navigating obstacles. New research, which involved asking a group of university students to walk in a simulated environment with random slip hazards, concluded that texting does in fact increase the risk of falling. “On any day it seems as many as 80% of people, both younger and older, may be head down and texting. I wondered: is this safe?” said senior author Matthew Brodie, a neuroscientist and engineer at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). “This made me want to investigate the dangers of texting while walking. I wanted to know if these dangers are real or imagined and to measure the risk in a repeatable way.” Researchers in the study, published in the journal *Heliyon*, recruited 50 UNSW students to walk along a tiled hazard walkway, which included a tile that could slide out of place causing the person to slip. Students wore a safety harness to prevent injury, and sensors to collect their motion data, while walking along the walkway either without texting or while typing “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog”. To better simulate the uncertainty of real life, students were told only that they might or might not slip, allowing the researchers to study how texting pedestrians might anticipate and try to prevent a potential slip, such as by leaning forward. Despite motion data showing texting participants tried to be more cautious in response to the risk, this did not minimise their risk of falling, and texting increased the range of the “trunk angle” when walkers went from leaning forwards to slipping backwards. They also found walking reduced texting accuracy, even when participants did not slip. The researchers concluded that educational measures, such as signs, would be less effective at reaching a population likely to take risks even if they were aware of the dangers of texting and walking – and who were more likely to be looking down than up. They suggested technology could be used to detect walking and activate a phone screen lock to prevent texting during that time, similar to what has already been created to prevent people using their phone while driving.