

Texting while walking impairs stride, poses risks

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A woman uses her cellphone on January 7, 2014 in Los Angeles, California

Texting while walking impairs a person's ability to follow a straight line and keep a normal pace, and may pose risks to pedestrians according to a study out Wednesday.

Researchers at the University of Queensland in Australia decided to study texting while walking since it appeared no one had actually scientifically analyzed how the modern preoccupation impacts a person's

gait.

Anecdotally, the evidence was clear, even among the 26 people they selected for the study: one in three admitted to having had some sort of texting accident, "including falls, trips and collisions with obstacles or other individuals."

Previous research has shown that texting and walking in virtual environments can raise the risk of accidents.

The rise in the number of pedestrians injured while using their mobile phones to talk or text since 2006 has also raised concern, and some towns in the United States have gone so far as to ban the activity.

For this study, volunteers agreed to walk about nine meters (yards) without any distraction so their gait could be tracked with a three-dimensional movement analysis system.

Then, they did the same walk while reading on their mobile phones, and again while texting.

They swerved the most while texting. They also slowed down, and their heads and necks adopted a newly rigid posture that was not seen during their phone-free walks.

Posture and balance were also compromised.

Reading while walking was not quite as bad, but still worse than simply walking.

"Texting, and to a lesser extent reading, on your mobile phone affects your ability to walk and balance," said lead author Siobhan Schabrun.

"This may impact the safety of people who text and walk at the same time."

More information: Schabrun SM, van den Hoorn W, Moorcroft A, Greenland C, Hodges PW (2014) Texting and Walking: Strategies for Postural Control and Implications for Safety. *PLoS ONE* 9(1): e84312. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0084312](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0084312)

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