

Driver Distractions

SAFETY
tips

How's your due care and attention?

Ironclad rules like the four-way stop, driving on the right, or red means stop are necessary for orderly traffic flow and to prevent chaos. But beyond that, good driving comes down to essentially one thing, paying attention.

Most slip-ups in driving result from lapses of attention. Anything that takes your mind from the road and reduces your ability to respond can multiply your risk of crashing.

How serious is driver distraction?

A basic rule of the road is to maintain due care and attention.

Some form of driver inattention was involved in almost 80 per cent of crashes and 65 per cent of near-crashes within three seconds of the event, according to an April 2006 study by the U.S.-based National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

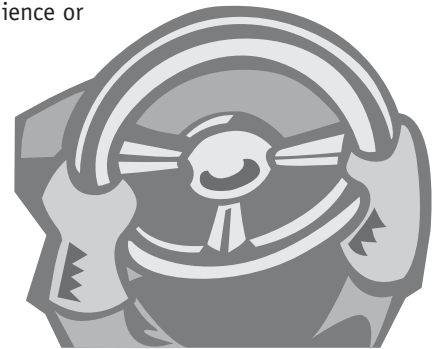
Multi-tasking while driving has become commonplace. To a great extent, society has condoned this by designing vehicles with cup holders and complex in-dash entertainment and navigation systems. Drivers eat meals, drink beverages, change radio stations, switch CDs or tapes, talk on a cellphone, chat with passengers, interact with children requiring care and attention, or even read a map. Any of these activities while driving jeopardize the driver's ability to see, analyze and react to sudden changes on the roadway.

Adjust your attitude

Essentially, safe driving comes down to drivers' attitudes. Drivers who perceive their vehicle as a comfortable place to accomplish other tasks while travelling may find it easier to ignore safety for the sake of convenience or entertainment.

If, however, they perceive their vehicle as potentially dangerous pieces of equipment that can cause tremendous harm

if used improperly, they are more likely to appreciate driving for what it is: a complex task that demands all of our concentration and attention if it is to be done safely.



Managing driver distractions

(several tips provided by the Canada Safety Council: www.safety-council.org)

- **Make sure child passengers are comfortable and properly secured in child restraint devices.** To keep children from distracting the driver, provide them with safe items to keep them occupied (colouring, reading, soft toys, etc). Also, make sure pets are stowed safely in travel carriers.

- **Pull over to eat or drink.** Children or adults may choke on food while the vehicle is in motion causing a severe distraction for the driver. By stopping, you give yourself a break from traffic and enjoy your refreshments.

- **Check your route before departing.** If you're unfamiliar with where you're going, pull over to read a map to avoid stress and distractions.

- **Complete your grooming before driving.** Don't rely on vehicle time to shave, apply makeup or comb your hair.

- **Do not engage in emotionally charged conversations** — either with your passengers or on your cellphone. Such discussions can result in aggressive or erratic driving behaviour.



- **Drive defensively.** Be prepared for poor driving conditions or unsafe actions of other drivers, pedestrians or cyclists. Expect the unexpected.
- **Be familiar with the equipment in your vehicle,** including all control switches. This is especially important if you have a new or rental vehicle. Practice using the equipment before driving so you can perform basic functions without taking your eyes off the road.
- **Keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.** Avoid using your cellphone while driving. Find a safe time and place to pull over to the side of the road when talking on your cellphone or taking notes.
- **Place calls before you drive** — prior to leaving the parking lot, office, or home. Otherwise, wait until you get to your destination. Meanwhile, let your voice mail pick up your calls.



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