

Most seniors use cellphones while behind the wheel

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(HealthDay)—When you think of cellphones and driving, you probably

picture a chatty teen behind the wheel. But new research suggests that seniors are often guilty of this dangerous practice, too.

And that's true even if they have children in the car, a new survey found.

"Of those senior drivers who have a cellphone, 60 percent of them speak on the phone while behind the wheel. And seniors with a skewed sense of their multitasking abilities are most likely to engage in this behavior," Dr. Linda Hill, of the University of California, San Diego, said in a university news release. Hill is a professor in the School of Medicine's department of family medicine and public health.

For the study, the researchers conducted an anonymous survey of almost 400 adults, aged 65 and older. Hill's team asked the seniors about their driving habits and potentially distracting behaviors. Of the respondents, 82 percent owned a smartphone.

"The survey results found [older adults](#) are driving distracted less than their younger counterparts, but are still engaging in this dangerous behavior," Hill said.

Cellphone use aside, some older drivers have health problems that affect their ability to drive safely, such as vision problems, frailty and thinking/memory impairment. Also, some medications can cause side effects that impair driving skills. Older drivers may also have reduced attention and mental-processing speed, the researchers noted.

Using a cellphone while driving increases the risk of a crash fourfold, the study authors said, adding that hands-free and hand-held devices are equally dangerous. This increased risk is the same as driving with a 0.08 [blood alcohol content](#), which is the legal limit for intoxication, according to the study authors. Texting is linked with an eight to 16 times increased risk of a crash.

"There is concern that adding distraction to the reduced skills of some older adults will increase these crash rates even further," Hill said.

But [older drivers](#) don't seem to be aware of the raised potential for accidents: 75 percent said they could drive safely while talking on a hands-free device.

The study also found that in the past month, 27 percent of respondents drove with children younger than age 11 in the car. Of those [drivers](#), 42 percent talked on the phone while behind the wheel.

"When adults are driving distracted with children in the car, not only does it put children at risk, but they are also modeling risky behavior," Hill said. "No call is so urgent that it can't wait until the driver is able to pull over to a safe place."

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness month.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [distracted driving](#).

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