

# Distracted walking: A serious issue for you, not me

2 December 2015

A new study on [distracted walking](#) released today by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) finds that more than three quarters (78 percent) of U.S. adults believe that distracted walking is a "serious" issue; however, 74 percent of Americans say "other people" are usually or always walking while distracted, while only 29 percent say the same about themselves.

This sense of "it's not me, it's you" cuts across a range of distracted walking behaviors:

- 90 percent say they see walkers talking on the phone (and 37 percent admit doing so themselves)
- 88 percent are engaging in conversation (vs. 75 percent themselves)
- 88 percent are listening to music (vs. 34 percent themselves)
- 85 percent are using a smartphone (vs. 28 percent themselves)
- 64 percent are generally "zoning out," or not focused on walking (vs. 38 percent themselves)

Despite the obvious risks associated with distracted walking, as many believe it is "embarrassing in a silly way" as feel it is "dangerous" (46 percent). Furthermore, 31 percent say distracted walking is "something I'm likely to do" and 22 percent think distracted walking is "funny," according to the study conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs during October 2015.

"Today, the dangers of the 'digital deadwalker' are growing with more and more pedestrians falling down stairs, tripping over curbs, bumping into other walkers, or stepping into traffic causing a rising number of injuries—from scrapes and bruises to sprains and fractures," said Alan Hilibrand, MD, AAOS spokesperson. Emergency department hospital visits for injuries involving distracted pedestrians on cell phones more than doubled between 2004 and 2010, according to a 2013

study appearing in the journal Accident, Analysis & Prevention.

The AAOS research, which involved more than 2,000 respondents nationally and another 4,000, total, in select urban areas, found that nearly four out of 10 Americans say they have personally witnessed a distracted walking incident, and just over a quarter (26 percent) say they have been in an incident themselves.

- Of those injured, women age 55 and over are most likely to suffer serious injuries, while Millennials, ages 18-34, are least likely to be injured while walking distracted, despite reporting higher rates of distracted walking incidents.
- The perceptions of distracted walking also differ by generation, with 70 percent of Millennials believing that distracted walking is a serious issue compared to 81 percent of those age 35 and older. Half of Millennials think distracted walking is "embarrassing - in a funny way."
- Millennials are more likely to engage in common distracted walking behaviors than older people are: texting, listening to music and talking on the phone.
- More Americans view distracted driving and impaired driving as "very" or "somewhat serious" - 96 and 95 percent, respectively.

## Can we talk and walk at the same time?

One of challenges in combatting distracted walking may be that Americans are overly confident in their ability to multitask. When asked why they walk distracted, 48 percent of respondents say "they just don't think about it," 28 percent feel "they can walk and do other things," and 22 percent "are busy and want to use their time productively."

# Distracted Walking: Seriously It's Not Me, It's You

78% of U.S. adults believe that distracted walking is a "serious" issue.



A new study on distracted walking by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) finds that more than three quarters (78 percent) of US adults believe that distracted walking is a 'serious' issue; however, 74 percent of Americans say 'other people' are usually or always walking while distracted, while only 29 percent say the same about themselves. Credit: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

## Who's Distracted?

74% of Americans say other people are "usually/almost always" and "sometimes" walking while distracted, while only 29% say the same about themselves.



Among distracted walking behaviors, 75 percent of respondents say they themselves "usually/always" or "sometimes" have "active conversations" with another person they are walking with, making this the most common distracted walking behavior people admit to doing themselves.

## Common Distractions of Walkers

### What they see others do:

Includes "usually/almost always" and "sometimes" answers

- 90% Talking on the phone
- 88% Engaging in conversation
- 88% Listening to music
- 85% Using a smartphone
- 64% Generally "zoning out"



Perceptions vary by city, region. Additionally, 500 people were surveyed in eight markets: New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, Phoenix, Seattle, Philadelphia and Atlanta. Among those findings:

- Among these eight markets, New York City residents are most likely to view distracted walking as a serious issue (86 percent), and Seattle residents were least likely to view the issue as serious (77 percent).
- New Yorkers are more likely to say they personally walk distracted (39 percent) than walkers living in the other cities.
- Residents of Chicago and Philadelphia are most likely to see distracted walking as "dangerous" (49 percent), while those in Houston were the least likely to think it's dangerous (40 percent).

4 out of 10 Americans say they have personally witnessed a distracted walking incident.



26% say they have been in an incident themselves.



## 5 Tips for Pedestrians:

1. **Focus** on the people and obstacles in front of you.
2. Maintain a **volume** on headphones where you can still hear the sounds of traffic.
3. Don't jaywalk. Cross streets at a **traffic light**.
4. **Look up**, not down, especially near curbs, intersections and escalators.
5. **Stay alert** in mall and other parking lots, especially when dark.



## Walk safely, especially during this busy holiday season

Earlier this year, AAOS launched the "Digital Deadwalkers" public service announcement (PSA) campaign, featuring radio and television segments, airing through the end of 2016 throughout the U.S., that humorously but effectively highlight the dangers of distracted walking, while urging pedestrians to "engage!"

The AAOS also offers the following tips to help

Tips and more info available at: [OrthoInfo.org/distractedpedestrians](http://OrthoInfo.org/distractedpedestrians)



pedestrians stay injury free, when walking indoors and outdoors, especially during this busy holiday season:

- If you must use headphones or other electronic devices, maintain a volume where you can still hear the sounds of traffic and your surroundings.
- While you walk, focus on the people, as well as the objects and obstacles in front of and around you.
- Don't jaywalk. Cross streets carefully, preferably at a traffic light, remaining cognizant of the pedestrian traffic flow and the cars and bikes in and near the road.
- Look up, not down, especially when stepping off or onto curbs or in the middle of major intersections; and/or when walking or approaching on stairs or escalators.
- Traffic can be especially busy during the holidays—stay alert in mall and other parking lots, and on and near streets, especially during the winter months when it gets dark earlier.
- If you need to talk to a child or the person next to you, make a phone call, text or other action that could distract you from the goal of getting where you need to go safely, stop and do so away from the pedestrian traffic flow.

"The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons urges pedestrians to avoid musculoskeletal and other injuries by engaging with their surroundings—drivers, bikers, other walkers and obstacles," said Dr. Hilibrand. "Many of us simply need to force ourselves to set down our devices and focus on what's in front of and around us. This will ensure that we safely arrive at our destination, during this busy holiday season and throughout the year."

More information on distracted walking can be found at: [OrthoInfo.org/DistractedPedestrians](https://orthoinfo.org/DistractedPedestrians).

Provided by American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

APA citation: Distracted walking: A serious issue for you, not me (2015, December 2) retrieved 26 September 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-distracted-issue.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*