Breaking the Habit of Distracted Driving

If you text and drive, you are 20 times more likely to be in a collision. If you drive while talking on the phone you are 6 times more likely to be involved in a collision than someone who is DRUNK. The consequences of texting and driving can be disastrous and life changing for all parties involved Click here. The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration offers the following guidance Click here.

So, what do you do if you don’t want to use your phone while you’re driving?

This is an easy one if you understand the anatomy of a habit. When people think about a habit, they tend to only think about the action itself. But a habit is made up of 3 parts, and all parts are equally important.

**Trigger**
A habit often happens unconsciously. You’re not thinking that it’s time to start it. You’re not thinking about it as you’re doing it. So, then the question is... How do you know that it’s time to do it? You’ve been triggered. Something in your environment has told you it’s time to act in a certain way or it’s time to launch into a specific behavior. The easiest place to see this happening is in your morning. Your alarm clock is a trigger that tells you it’s time to do something. And what that something is depends on what your habits are. Do you get right out of bed when the alarm goes off or do you make a habit of pressing the snooze alarm? And what do you do after you get out of bed? I go into the bathroom to brush my teeth. What do you do? When you’re done with that, what do you do? Your whole morning is a series of habits each one triggering the next. And you don’t have to think about it. You don’t have to decide to do it. That’s the power of triggers. They press play on your neural wiring.

**Action**
This is the part of the habit we are most aware of. Drinking coffee. Checking text messages. Checking Facebook.

**Reward**
You get something out of doing your habits. There’s some kind of benefit. It could be a physical benefit like a jolt of caffeine. Or it could be a mental benefit, like a sense of completion. Or it could be a social benefit, like feeling more connected to your friends. Something is going on in your body, your mind, or your heart and very likely it’s causing your brain to release endorphins or dopamine into your bloodstream— and that’s the real reward. Those chemicals feel great.

In other words, something causes you to behave in a certain way in order to get a particular benefit. In this case, the trigger for checking your text messages is the sound your phone makes, and the reward is finding out what happened.

If you want to break a bad habit, you want to disrupt the anatomy of the habit. When it comes to texting while driving, it’s easy to break the bad habit by removing the trigger. If there’s no trigger, the bad habit never launches.

Remove the trigger by setting your phone to "Do Not Disturb While Driving". If someone sends you a text while you’re driving, they receive an automatic reply letting them know that you’re unavailable. If the message is important, the sender can type the word "urgent" to make sure that you receive a notification— which you can then pull over to read. While you’re driving, phone calls go right to voicemail unless you’ve marked the setting to allow calls from your Favorites or if the same person calls twice in a row.

Apple has this technology built right into their operating system, and you can access it through the settings menu. If you have an Android, you’ll have to download an app like Driving Detective or On my Way.

Is it worth 2 minutes to set up Do Not Disturb While Driving, so you can keep your eyes and mind on the road?

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