**Multi-Tasking**

**Another reason to hate cell phones: Next time you're stuck in traffic, blame cell phones. Motorists who are blabbing on cell phones, even hands-free devices, invariably slow down slightly, and don't pay attention to the flow of traffic, a new study found. They fail to change lanes appropriately, and tend to bunch up behind slow-moving cars, slowing down everyone around them. "Your frontal cortex can handle only so many tasks at one time, so you slow down," researcher David Strayer of the University of Utah tells the Associated Press. Since one in 10 drivers is on the phone at any one time, those delays really add up. Strayer estimates that drivers who use cell phones add up to 10 percent to the time of an average person's commute. *(The Week magazine, January 18, 2008)***

**High-tech gadgets make it possible for people to travel through time . . . well, sort of. To leap forward 40 to 50 years in physical abilities, merely talk on a cell phone while cruising down the road. Research at the University of Utah shows that when drivers between 18 and 25 chat on a cell phone, they cannot react to a braking situation any better than a 65- to 74-year-old. Employing a driving simulator to measure reaction times, psychologist David Strayer found teenagers have the greatest trouble combining driving and talking, but the problem affects all generations. “We see that accident rates, if you’re using a cell phone, are about four times greater than if you’re not using a cell phone,” he says. “Cell phones seem to be a distraction across the age range. *(Kurt Repanshek, in Discover magazine, January, 2006)***

**Child: "I couldn't decide if I should go sledding or just drink hot chocolate all day. So I said, 'Why not both/'" After the child crashes, the Dog says: "That's why not." Child: "Man, this thing need some cupholders!" *(Ron Ruelle, in Penelope's Pets comic strip)***

“Distracted driving” as a result of cell phone use and texting behind the wheel led to 5,474 deaths last year – one in six of all traffic fatalities, the federal government said. Auto accidents caused by cell phones and texting also led to 448,000 injuries. *(The Washington Post, as it appeared in The Week magazine, October 8, 2010)*

When distractions kill: Thousands of teenage drivers die each year because of the distractions of cell phones, radios, and other passengers, says a new study. By and large, teens are heeding warnings about drinking and driving, with a 35 percent decline in drinking-related fatal accidents involving teens since 1990. But car accidents remain the No. 1 killer of teens, and a new survey of 5,600 young drivers says a major reason is that they are extremely distractible. Nine out of 10 teens admitted they’d seen a friend talking or dialing a cell phone while they were driving. Half said they’d seen peers typing text messages or fooling around with hand-held games or MP3 players. On top of that, kids often jump into cars when they are very tired from lack of sleep, or flooded with strong emotions over school problems, fights with friends, and conflict with parents, insurance researcher Laurette Stiles tells the Associated Press. “They’re trying to manage all of that while trying to navigate the vehicle at the same time,” says Stiles. “And they’re pretty inexperienced at that.” *(The Week magazine, February 16, 2007)*

**More than 90 percent of drivers say they speed, eat, use cell phones or even read while at the wheel, according to a poll by Volvo Cars of North America, AAA and Partners for Highway Safety. Among the findings: 73 percent of drivers speed; 59 percent ate while driving; and 37 percent used a cell phone. *(Rocky Mountain News, May 28, 2003)***

**Drivers are doing more than just texting behind the wheel. In a new study by Braun Research, 33 percent admitted they regularly send and read emails while driving, while 28 percent said they browse the internet and 27 percent said they use Facebook. *(Vox.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, June 5, 2015)***

**DISTRACTED DRIVING: Hands-free cell phone conversations while driving are as safe -- or as risky -- as talking to a passenger. A complex mental workload can reduce a driver's ability to detect visual targets by as much as 30 percent. Distracted drivers also are less able to discriminate between visual targets and select a response. *(Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, 2003)***

**Good week for: Turning off the radio, after a British study found that people who listen to sports on the car radio become so absorbed in the games that their reaction times slow by up to 20 percent, making them drive as if they were drunk. *(The Week magazine, June 16, 2010)***

**Smartphone distraction: People who incessantly check their smartphones and surf the web are more likely to be forgetful, have trouble focusing, and lack awareness of their surroundings -- even when they aren't fixated on the internet, a new study finds. Constantly staring at a mobile device or obsessively trolling social media sites may usurp precious brain resources necessary for performing routine tasks, resulting in these "cognitive failures," British researchers say. Their study involved 210 men and women between 18 and 65 who spent an average of 23 hours online each week. The more participants browsed the web, reports HuffingtonPost.com, the more likely they were to make a range of blunders -- bumping into things, for example, or forgetting why they'd walked from one room to another. These findings don't prove that smartphones themselves cause attention lapses, but people prone to distraction may do well to take a technology time-out and fight the urge to check Facebook, Tinder, or their email. "The internet is great, mobile phones are great," says the study's lead author, Lee Hadlington. "But there is a point at which we need to sit back, log off, and really start to think about how technology is impacting on our capacity to focus." *(The Week magazine, September 11, 2015)***

**About 58 percent of high school seniors admit to texting while driving, according to a new study of 15,000 teens. Texting and cell phone use behind the wheel is “a national epidemic,” said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. *(Associated Press, as it appeared in The Week magazine, June 22, 2012)***

**The truth about multitasking: Modern humans have embraced multitasking with all four limbs. We text while walking, chat on the phone while driving, check e-mail while writing the annual report. Psychology textbooks suggest that our brains can't successfully process so much at once. "But if you walk around on the street, you see lots of people multitasking," Stanford researcher Eyal Ophir tells BBCNews.com. "So we asked ourselves, 'What is it that these multitaskers are good at that enable them to do this?'" The surprising answer is nothing." Ophir and colleagues categorized subjects into two groups, high and low multitaskers, according to the amount of electronic information they typically consumed. Then they ran them through several experiments designed to test the skills that multitaskers ostensibly possess. To test their ability to ignore irrelevant information, for example, subjects were shown a screen with both red rectangles and blue rectangles; when subjects saw the screen a second time, they were asked whether any of the red rectangles had been rotated. High multitaskers consistently scored much worse; they were less able to ignore distractions, had more fallible memories, and couldn't switch to new tasks as readily. "The shocking discovery of this research" is that high multitaskers "are lousy at everything that's necessary for multitasking," says co-author Clifford Nass. "They're suckers for irrelevancy. Everything distracts them." Left unclear is why chronic multitaskers fail. Are they naturally bad at focusing, so they multitask to compensate? Or does multitasking actively degrade their ability to concentrate? Either way, the lesson is the same: If you want to get more done, try doing less. *(The Week magazine, September 11, 2009)***

**To do two things at once is to do neither. *(Pulilius Syrus)***

**Bad week for: Multitasking, after authorities in Yuzhou, China, stopped a woman who was weaving her moped through traffic while simultaneously breast-feeding her 18-month-old son. *(The Week magazine, September 13, 2013)***

**Women's gift for multitasking: Busy women who juggle home and career often claim to be better at multitasking than men, and now there's evidence to support them. After administering several tests to 120 men and 120 women, British psychologists concluded that men have more trouble juggling priorities -- and are slower and less organized than women when switching between them. The researchers found that men and women were equally adept at completing two tasks on a computer when they could tackle them one at a time, but men's performance slowed more substantially -- by 77 percent compared with 69 percent for women -- when they were forced to switch rapidly between the tasks. In another experiment, participants were given eight minutes to locate restaurants on a map, do simple math problems, answer the phone, and decide how to search for a lost key in a field. Particularly in the lost key challenge, women outperformed men, who were more impulsive and failed to think through their search. University of Hertfordshire psychologist Keith Laws tells BBC.com that the study suggests that "in a stressed and complicated situation, women are more able to stop and think about what's going on in front of them." *(The Week magazine, November 15, 2013)***