

The Psychology Behind Distracted Driving: Understanding the Urge to Multitask

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There was a time when modern devices like smartphones, GPS devices, and infotainment systems in cars didn't exist, but drivers still had to contend with other distractions. These included children in the back seat, beautiful scenery, and daydreaming, which are also leading causes of car accidents.

All forms of distractions are dangerous to some extent. But there may be nothing you can do to help in some cases, for example, getting lost in thought while at the wheel.

Activities like talking on the phone, texting, messing with the infotainment system, watching a video clip, etc., call for multitasking and are 100 percent avoidable, especially considering the dangers they pose. But it may not be as easy as it sounds, as it is part of human nature to want to multitask.

What Is Multitasking?

Psychology describes multitasking as the act of handling more than one task at a time. The complexity of multitasking and its effect on the brain depends on the types of activities a person is engaging in at once.

For example, it doesn't take a lot in terms of brain faculties to listen to music while driving, so such a thing isn't much of a big deal. However, being in a conference meeting while driving is difficult, as both activities require much more attention, making the chances of getting into a car accident much higher.

How Does Multitasking Affect the Brain?

People handle multitasking differently, but it doesn't make it safe for anyone while at the wheel. The science behind how the brain functions shows that the human brain can handle one task at a time, so it's right to say there is nothing like multitasking as far as the brain goes.

What looks like multitasking is actually the brain switching between different tasks at a relatively high speed, but it can only focus on one task at any given millisecond. Eventually, the switching back and forth affects focus, accuracy, and a person's effectiveness.

The Psychology of Distracted Driving

Distracted driving at face value is a choice. However, if you dig deeper, you will realize it takes much more than making a choice to keep off because it also has something to do with most drivers' psychology. Technology, especially communication technologies like social media, are built to be attention-grabbing, and the more time you stay on there, the more perceived satisfaction you get.

There is always the allure of knowing what has happened in the past few minutes, how your post is doing, who's liking it, and stuff like that. This allure and the dopamine hits individuals get from the likes and comments make staying away a battle against the mind.

There is also social pressure, and this is especially true for younger drivers. Since everyone talks of doing it, or how good they are at it, the habit seems less and less risky.

Drives can be boring and too monotonous. For people who love mind-stimulating activities, their minds always crave something exciting that only a device can offer.

You Can Avoid Driving Distracted

It won't be easy to break a bad habit. But understanding that multitasking is a myth and that it's only a matter of time till you make a terrible mistake should make you want to think twice about it.

It is a matter of life and death, so the question is not if you like keeping off your devices but if you want to save lives. Be intentional, even when it means putting distractions out of reach until you reach your destination.

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