

# Wellness Newsletter

## Counteracting Unhealthy Effects of Cell Phone Use

MARCH 2018

### **People depend on their cell phones to access all types of useful health-related information.**

Ironically, there is a growing body of evidence linking frequent mobile phone use to unhealthy effects including distraction, depression and possibly cancer.

The temptation to be on the phone – talking, texting, taking pictures, engaging in social networks, using apps and just looking things up – is hard to resist. A [compilation of surveys](#) found people use their mobile phones an average of more than four hours a day. Among the estimated 95 percent of Americans who own a cell phone, at least 75 percent have smartphones with internet access, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).

It's important to understand why social scientists and medical professionals recommend monitoring and potentially reducing cell phone use for behavioral and physical health reasons.

### **Distraction**

Studies show that when you are using either a hand-held or hands-off cell phone, you can't fully focus your attention on other activities. Epidemiological research has found that cell phone use is associated with a four-fold increase in the odds of getting into an accident – a risk comparable to that of driving drunk, according to the [American Psychological Association](#). The [National Safety Council](#), which sponsors a distracted driving campaign, reports a growing number of employers are adopting policies banning the use of cell phones in vehicles on company time for safety reasons.

### **Behavioral Health**

In her book, [How to Break Up with Your Phone](#), Catherine Price writes that “many of the same feel-good brain chemicals and reward loops that drive addictions are also released and activated when we check our phones.”

However, a mobile device that offers instant gratification can also make people feel disconnected.

For example, [a 2016 study](#) revealed heavy use of social media platforms is significantly associated with depression. In [a 2017 study](#), young adults with high social media use were found to feel more socially isolated than their peers with lower use rates. In 2015, [AVG Technologies](#) conducted a global survey and found that many children feel unimportant when parents are fixated on their phones.

### **What Can You Do?**

1. Don't talk or text when driving, operating equipment, biking, running or walking.
2. If you have a compulsive need to check messages or your phone use seems to be interfering with professional and personal relationships:
  - Put your phone away when you are meeting in person with people.
  - Reduce the number of social media apps you access.
  - Limit yourself to 15-minute use intervals at set times of the day.
  - Don't bring your smartphone with you to bed.
  - Practice stress-reduction techniques if you feel anxious.



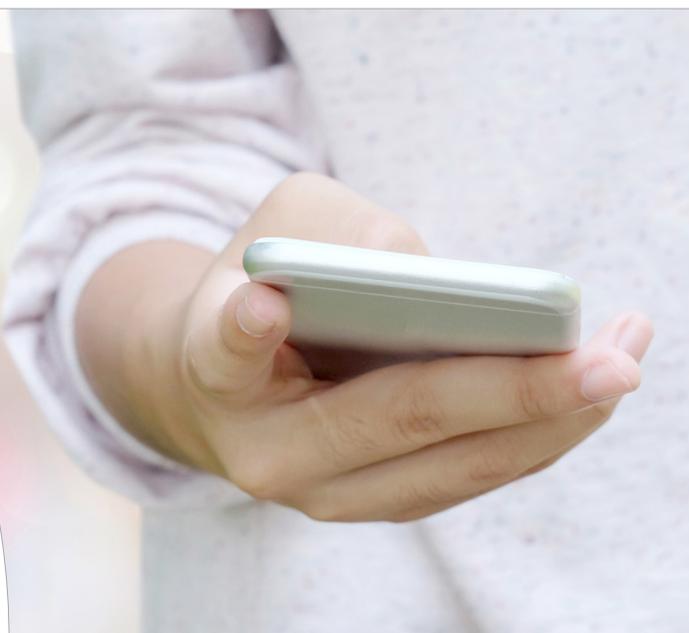
3. Get professional advice if you feel you or a family member need help reducing smartphone use.
4. Check out how Arianna Huffington, CEO of Thrive Global, has responded to concerns about cell phone addiction and associations with depression, anxiety and increased suicide risk with – of all things – a smartphone app. The [Thrive app](#) in partnership with Samsung limits notifications, calls and texts, has an auto-reply function and helps users monitor phone time.

## Cancer Links

Cell phones may have the potential to cause certain types of cancer because they emit radiofrequency radiation (RFR) and tissues nearest to the antenna can absorb this energy, according to the [National Cancer Institute](#).

The [World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer](#) has classified RF fields as possibly carcinogenic to humans. For comparison, coffee, extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields (power line frequency) and talc-based body powder have the same classification.

In the U.S., [the Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC) states "there is no scientific evidence to date that proves that wireless phone usage can lead to cancer or a variety of other health effects, including headaches, dizziness or memory loss." The FCC sets emission limits based on rates of energy absorption by the body. Phones sold in the U.S. must have a specific absorption rate (SAR) limit of 1.6 watts per kg. Studies of the human head show the SAR limit is unlikely to be exceeded with routine use.



Similarly, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says the weight of scientific evidence does not show an association with adverse health outcomes, although scientists agree more research is needed to close knowledge gaps. The FDA has directed the [National Toxicology Program \(NTP\) to study cell phone RFR exposure effects](#). The program released two related rodent studies in February, one of which found tumors in male rats after high-level exposure.

## What Can You Do?

If you are concerned about potential RFR exposure effects:

- Limit time spent talking directly on your phone
- Use hands-free, speaker mode or wired headset
- Carry and place the phone away from your body
- Choose a device with a low SAR rating
- Keep the phone in airplane mode
- Wait for a strong signal

The FTC advises consumers to investigate the effectiveness of phone accessories that claim to reduce exposure to RF waves.