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## Defensive Walking 101

by [BERKELEY WELLNESS](#) | JANUARY 06, 2015

About every two hours, a pedestrian is killed by a motor vehicle in this country. Every seven minutes, one is injured. In 2012, that added up to about 4,700 fatalities and 76,000 injuries. Those are some of the grim statistics routinely compiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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To blame: driver distraction, speeding, and failure to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks, as well as [alcohol](#), weather, and darkness, among other factors. But pedestrians are often at fault too, such as when they don't cross where and when they are supposed to and when they themselves are distracted.

One of the leading causes of distraction these days is the use of mobile devices—by both drivers and pedestrians. A 2013 [study](#) in *Public Health Reports* noted a 50 percent spike in pedestrian deaths between 2005 and 2010 due to drivers being distracted by cell phones or other devices, while a [study](#) in *Accident Analysis and Prevention* found that pedestrian injuries related to cell phone use more than doubled in that time period. If you are talking, texting, listening to music, or making adjustments on

your phone, you are not paying full attention to your surroundings.

According to the CDC, most pedestrian deaths occur in urban areas, non-intersections, and at night; pedestrians over 65 are at highest risk for serious injury and death. Notably, one-third of pedestrians killed meet the legal limit for drunk driving. Just as you should not drive drunk, you should not walk drunk (unless escorted by a sober companion).

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## Safe crossings

Much of the solution to reducing pedestrian traffic accidents lies in improving traffic control, street design, and vehicle technology, while also increasing enforcement of traffic laws and raising penalties, as some localities have done. A program that incorporates such measures is [Vision Zero](#), which originated in Sweden and was proposed last year by Mayor de Blasio for New York City, where there's been a recent spate of headline-making pedestrian traffic deaths.

But even with such measures in place, the key to making it safely to the other side of the street is to be vigilant—even hypervigilant. Never let down your guard or allow yourself to become distracted. And don't assume it's safe to cross just because the light is green.

Here are some simple lifesaving tips, gleaned from various federal agencies, state health departments, and consumer organizations, along with common sense:

- Cross at designated crosswalks and always with the light, if there is one. Don't cross in the middle of a block, especially between parked cars (you'll be in trouble if a driver in a parked car doesn't see you and starts to move).
- Look in all directions before entering the crosswalk, and keep scanning until you reach the other side. Cars and cyclists can be traveling the wrong way or may not stop at a red light or stop sign. Don't blindly follow other pedestrians.
- Check for turning vehicles and cyclists before you step off the curb and while you are crossing, even if there is a "no turn on red" signal.
- If your view of approaching traffic is blocked by a stopped car or anything else, wait until you have clear visibility of what might cross your path.
- As you cross the street, make eye contact with drivers to be sure they see you. A good way to get their attention is to walk with your arm outstretched and palm open toward them—like what a crossing guard might do to stop cars—or give a friendly wave. Drivers seem to have an automatic response to an outstretched arm and hand, stopping when they normally would not have yielded.
- When crossing, [don't talk or text on a cell phone](#) or use any electronic device for any purpose. Keep your ears tuned to the traffic around you, not to music on your device—or at least lower the volume and use only one earbud.
- Watch for driveways and entrances to parking garages where vehicles cross over the sidewalk. Look both ways for vehicles that may be entering from the street or exiting from the garage. Also be alert when walking in parking lots, where cars are backing up and turning from all directions.

- If streets are not well lit at night, wear light-colored or reflective clothing to increase your visibility—or carry a flashlight.

*men's health walking women's health*



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