[The Guardian](http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian), 30 March 2014 [Luisa Dillner](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/luisadillner)

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**Should I reduce my texting?**

Chiropractors claim that the posture people adopt when using their mobile phones could shorten their lives. Is this really true?

Texting is bad for your health. Do it while walking and you can bump into walls or step out into traffic. [Studies have linked excessive texting with insomnia, stress and painful tendons (BlackBerry thumb)](http://psycnet.apa.org/?&fa=main.doiLanding&doi=10.1037/ppm0000012). Now the [United Chiropractic Association (UCA) has warned](http://www.united-chiropractic.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Mobile-Device-Use.pdf) that texting for long periods could lower life expectancy because it makes people lean forward. The association links "forward-leaning posture" (defined as dropping the head forward and rounding the shoulders) with the risk of developing [hyperkyphosis](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2907357/) in old age. Hyperkyphosis is an abnormal rounding of the upper spine that reduces the space available for the heart and lungs, so they are put under pressure and work less effectively. An older person with hyperkyphosis, chiropractors warn, will suffer the same increase in the risk of death as an obese person. The association is encouraging people to have their posture checked by a registered chiropractor. So should you limit your texting immediately?

**The solution**

Most people text too much (during meetings, at meals and when they're talking to you), and it's really annoying. But there is no good evidence that adopting the texting posture will cause structural changes to your back and lead to an increased risk of premature death.

The UCA's warning that poor posture is as big a threat to health as obesity is both dramatic and unfounded. That isn't to say that the forward-leaning position is harmless. A study from the [Centre for Musculoskeletal Research in Sweden found that texting](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0003687011000962) made people bend their head forward by more than 10 degrees and those who texted the most had the most neck and/or shoulder pain. [A small study of 138 students from Temple University in the US](http://www.livescience.com/5858-texting-pain-neck-study-suggests.html) also found a link between texting and neck and shoulder pain, but only in men sending more than 21 texts a day.

The condition of "text neck" caused by increased stress and muscle spasm is now a recognised 21st-century syndrome. If you want to avoid text neck, try meeting up with people, writing letters or phoning instead. If you must text, take a break after five minutes. Also hold your phone up so that it is at mouth height and you can see the screen by looking down with your eyes, rather than bending your neck. [Generally, however, research does not suggest](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19910263) there are any long-term risks. Texting does not seem to cause chronic backache and [a report in the European Spine Journal](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2271087/) states that that no interventions for poor posture reduced neck pain in workers. While medical professionals [disagree on what constitutes good posture](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12923476), most would agree that hunching for hours over a mobile phone falls into the not-so-good category.

[theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/), 23 January 2014 [Helen Davidson](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/helen-davidson)

Bas du formulaire

# Texting while walking poses safety risk and makes you 'like a robot', study finds

One third of young people who took part in Queensland study reported an accident while walking and using mobile phone

Walking while texting causes people to veer off course and makes them more susceptible to tripping. Photograph: Dave Hunt/AAP Image

Walking while using a phone causes people to slow down, veer off path and move like a robot, according to a new study which set out to look behind tales of people texting themselves into lampposts and fountains.

The study from the University of Queensland, [Texting and Walking: Strategies for Postural Control and Implications for Safety](http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0084312), sought to investigate the effect using a mobile phone had on people’s ability to walk and their subsequent safety when in public.

The reports’ authors wanted to take a look at the large number of [news reports](http://www.stuff.co.nz/science/9641634/The-dangers-of-texting-while-walking) and anecdotes of injuries – some serious – occurring when pedestrians had accidents while using their phone.

“There have been a lot of media reports of people who text and they walk into fountains or walk off piers or onto train tracks," co-author and physiotherapist Dr Siobhan Schabrun told Guardian Australia.

The people who took part in the study had their movement tracked while they walked a length of around nine metres – once while texting, once while reading a text and once without distraction.

The [report](http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0084312) made three main findings, said Schabrun. Firstly, when people walk and use their phone they slow down and swerve, even if they think they are walking in a straight line.

“Differences between typing and reading text were less pronounced, but typing text was associated with slower walking speed, [and] greater deviation from a straight line,” the report stated.

Secondly, people walk “like a robot”.

“They hold their body posture really rigid,” said Schabrun.

“Their arms, trunk and head are all fixed together and they walk a little bit more like a robot.”

Schabrun said this upsets a person’s balance, making them more susceptible to tripping, and also reduces their ability to react to tripping.

“The increased demand associated with manipulating a mobile phone may cause young healthy adults to prioritise movement of the head relative to the trunk at the expense of gait stability,” said the report.

In the report’s third finding, more than one third of the 26 “young and healthy” people who took part in the study reported having some sort of accident while walking and texting or reading.

It’s a huge proportion, said Schabrun, “particularly among a generation who is very adept at using their phones and who think they are good at dual-tasking”.

“If you’re walking along and texting, the key issue is that you think you’re walking in a straight line. But you’re actually not,” said Schabrun.

“You can end up having an accident.”

In 2011, US hospitals saw around 1,000 people visit emergency departments with a texting-related injury, [US media reported](http://www.americanownews.com/story/15408470/texting-while-walking-could-be-deadly). That same year, [Melbourne teenager Ryan Robbins died after falling from a multi-level carpark while texting a friend](http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/tragedy-of-gentlemanly-teen-who-fell-to-death-while-texting-20110208-1akv0.html).