



Dr. Oz Will See You Now



On Call

MEHMET OZ, MD, explains how to avoid cell phone dangers.

I GOT MY FIRST WIRELESS HANDHELD in 1990. It was as big and clunky as a brick, but the mobility it offered made it indispensable. There are now more than 270 million cell phone subscribers in America, and on average we spend about 11 hours a month with the gadgets glued to our heads. But as we've become more reliant on cell phones, experts have grown concerned about the health implications of heavy exposure—specifically, the radiation that the devices emit.

Cell phones expose us to a form of electromagnetic radiation called radiofrequency (RF) energy. Scientists have suspected that this radiation might increase the risk of brain cell damage leading to tumors, and in 1995 they found this to be the case in rats. Most studies since then have failed to show a similar

correlation in humans, and last December the Danish Cancer Society released results from a 29-year study that found no solid association between increasing cell phone use and brain tumors. Yet just months earlier, an analysis of the most rigorous studies found convincing evidence linking the use of handheld phones to brain tumors, especially in users of a decade or longer.

The medical community is paying attention, and so is the U.S. government. Last fall a Senate hearing on cell phones and health coincided with an international conference on the same subject. While more conclusive evidence is needed before we start clamoring for the return of pay phones, there are some simple ways you and your family can limit exposure to the radiation:



USE A HEADSET OR SPEAKERPHONE.

No reliable data exist on the upper limit of safe talk time, but corded headsets can reduce any potential risk. These emit much less RF energy, and allow you to move the phone away from your body. One study shows that using a headset lowers radiation exposure eightfold.



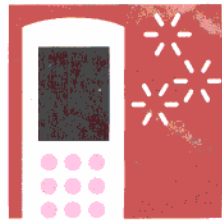
KEEP YOUR PHONE OUT OF YOUR POCKET.

A study published last year in the *Journal of Craniofacial Surgery* linked cell phone radiation to decreased bone density in the pelvis, and a 2008 study conducted by the Cleveland Clinic found that it lowers fertility in men.



STOP TALKING WHILE DRIVING.

In addition to creating a potentially deadly distraction, using your phone in the car forces your cell signal to jump between wireless towers. Since RF is highest when a connection with a tower is first established, talking while traveling can increase exposure.



DON'T CHAT WITH A POOR SIGNAL.

The harder your phone has to work to get reception, the more radiation it emits. This is the reason you should avoid using so-called radiation shields (the shiny stickers that claim to block radiation); they actually force the phone to transmit at a higher power.



LIMIT CHILDREN'S USE.

Kids have a thinner skull, and their brains are still developing—which may make them more vulnerable to any potential harmful effects of RF radiation.



DON'T WEAR WIRELESS HEADSETS AS IF THEY WERE JEWELRY.

Earpieces don't emit as much radiation as a phone, but they release some—even after your call ends. Remove the device between conversations.

Where's the safest place on an airplane?

Planes aren't exactly a hotbed of expertise, so I consulted data from the National Transportation Safety Board, which shows that survival rates are higher among passengers in the rear of the plane. Another study from the UK's Civil Aviation Authority found that passengers who sat in aisle seats within five rows of an exit were also more likely to survive. However, this is a much more common related threat for you: a seat is equally at risk of catching up a nasty bug. To avoid cold and flu, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before eating and after resting.

Is it okay to borrow a friend's prescription modafinil to help me stay alert?

Modafinil is meant to help with severe sleepiness from serious disorders like narcolepsy, and it's habit-forming. If you're having trouble staying alert all day, you're probably not getting enough sleep. Start by starting a sleep journal each night, no matter how busy your evening activities. Avoid alcohol, a glass of wine, or a late-night Web—and then track your morning log how long it takes you to fall asleep. You may notice patterns of fatigue that are keeping you