

The Cellphone Cloud - Is Radiation Harming You?

So you're on your cellphone more than you care to admit. Now, news reports are resuscitating an old story about the possible dangers of low levels of radiation emitted from these personal devices.

Yikes!

Is your trusty electronic buddy a threat to your health?

In two words: probably not. Or at least there's not enough proof that it could be.

"There's no evidence yet or scientific proof that it causes problems," says Dr. E. Robert Schwartz, a family medicine expert with the University of Miami Health System. "But it's a concern that seems to pop up every now and then."

The latest revival of this decades-old concern occurred when the California Department of Public Health released a document titled, "[How to Reduce Exposure to Radiofrequency Energy from Cellphones.](#)" Though it was not intended as a public warning, much of the coverage developed into precisely that.

To clear the air — and provide guidance — we dug up studies that have looked into the effects of cellphone radiation and their link to brain cancer and tumors. In 2014, the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) released a guide stating that there is no scientific evidence tying health problems to cellphones. Before that, both the American Cancer Society and the [World Health Organization](#) stated that, despite, thousands of studies (about 25,000 articles in the past 30 years), no evidence confirms a link between cell phone radiation and human health.

"Despite the feeling of some people that more research needs to be done, scientific knowledge in this area is now more extensive than for most chemicals," WHO stated. "Based on a recent in-depth review of the scientific literature, the WHO concluded that current evidence does not confirm the existence of any health consequences from exposure to low-level electromagnetic fields."

Still, this is far from a rousing endorsement and legitimate worries persist. What's more, a few small studies raise questions about the emission of electromagnetic radiation. One, in Sweden, found that longtime cellphone users had higher odds of developing brain cancer. (The American Cancer Society, however, noted that this study is not definitive and other research has not arrived at the same conclusion.) Another study, conducted by the National Institutes of Health's National Toxicology Program,

reported that rats exposed to low levels of radiation for nine hours a day had a higher risk of brain and heart tumors. (How this applies to humans is unclear.)

The California guidelines issued in December further report that “some laboratory experiments and human health studies have suggested the possibility that long-term, high use of cell phones may be linked to certain types of cancer and other health effects,” including lower sperm count, headaches and effects on learning, memory, hearing, and even behavior.

With science hedging bets on the effects on humans of exposure to electromagnetic radiation, Schwartz says he personally follows one simple rule — and suggests the same for his patients. “I don’t hold the phone to my ear when at all possible,” he says, noting that Bluetooth technology, as well as speakerphone and headset capabilities, allow the use of the device away from the body. Though phones do continue to emit when connected to Bluetooth (and WiFi), it is at lower levels.

Other concerns about the use of cellphones are particularly troublesome for Schwartz, however. Though they have nothing to do with the potential for cancer, they can be equally dangerous.

“People shouldn’t be using cell phones while driving and if they must, it should be with a hands-free device,” he says, citing the number of auto accidents due to distracted driving.

Cellphone use while driving leads to 1.6 million crashes each year, according to The National Safety Council, and nearly 330,000 injuries occur each year from accidents caused by texting while driving.

But it’s not just car accidents that concern Schwartz. He points to the many stories of people who have fallen into manholes or run into telephone poles or been hit by a car while crossing a street because their eyes were glued to the screen.

“To some degree, it’s not a medical problem but it is a health concern,” he says and offers one last piece of advice: “If you have to access your phone, stop whatever you are doing. Only when you’re finished with your phone, should you then continue with your activity.”



In Their Words

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