

# Can Cell Phones MAKE YOU SICK?

A look at the health dangers of cell phone radiation

BY **KIM GOSS, MS**

It seems just about everything will give you cancer. What other conclusion could we make based on what we read in the papers and watch on the news? We've heard that dental X-rays, deodorants, grilled meat and even playing with vinyl toys will give

you "The Big C." Some of these claims have little scientific basis, but one that is supported by research is cell phone radiation. Even so, the issue has yet to be taken seriously by most of the American public.

Leading the charge to educate the American population about the

risks of cell phone radiation is Devra Davis, PhD., MPH. Dr. Davis is a former director of the Center for Environmental Oncology of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute and is the author of *The Secret History of the War on Cancer* (Basic Books, 2007). She has testified

before a United States Senate committee panel about the risks of cell phone use, and her newest book about cell phone safety is *Disconnect: The Truth About Cell Phone Radiation, What the Industry Has Done to Hide It, and How to Protect Your Family* (Dutton, 2010).

One reason Americans are skeptical about the dangers of cell phone radiation is that there are no legal judgments against cell phone companies for causing cancer, and another is that there is apparently little evidence presently to show a cause-and-effect relationship.

In response to the first question, Davis says that there are a number of lawsuits against cell phone companies working their way through the US legal system, but as with the lawsuits against the tobacco industry, these lawsuits often take many years to resolve. Regarding the second question, Davis says it's only a matter of time – literally – until the evidence will be irrefutable.

Davis says it takes about 40 years after exposure to develop brain cancer, which she says we know from

observational studies that have been performed on those who were exposed to radiation from atomic bombs. “So the fact that we haven’t seen an increase in brain cancer yet doesn’t tell us that we will be fine in the future – and many of us have only been using cell phones in a very heavy way for a few years,” says Davis.

It’s only fair to point out that many cell phone companies have tested radiation levels of their products and also are including printed safety instructions in the packaging that comes with their products. However, Davis questions some of those tests, as they do not reflect real-world use. For example, during tests the phones are not pressed against the ear – and seriously, except in emergencies, cell phones should not be pressed against the ear because this increases the exposure. Davis also notes that when cell phones were first being used in the early ’90s, there were no such warnings.



Devra Davis

Davis says what is especially disturbing is that young children are being exposed to cell phones. She explains that the skull and bone marrow of children are thinner and more absorptive than in adults, and therefore will absorb much more radiation. When children are old enough to have a cell phone, Davis says, they should text rather than call, except for emergencies, as texting significantly reduces radiation exposure.

Besides cancer, another potential health issue with cell phone use is its effect on both sperm health (by damaging the DNA) and sperm count. These data come from research conducted in four independent research centers located in the United States, Australia, Greece and Turkey. Davis also says that in terms of safety, texting while driving is equivalent to driving drunk; for more information she suggests this Department of Transportation website: *distraction.gov*.

In her book Davis offers many practical suggestions on how to reduce the risk of radiation exposure from cell phones. For example, she recommends investing in a headset with a low-power Bluetooth emitter, using the speakerphone function whenever possible. She also recommends switching to a landline as often as possible (yes, electronics stores still sell them!), but not a cordless phone because these devices emit radio frequency radiation similar to that of a cell phone.

Cell phones are here to stay, and the dangers associated with their use are not urban myths. To paraphrase a quote from everyone’s favorite web-slinger, “Cell phones give you great power, but with great power comes great responsibility.” **ERS**

## PROTECT YOURSELF NOW

### 1. Use a head set

Using a speaker, hands-free device, or earphones when speaking on a cell phone distances it from the body and head and minimizes your exposure to radiation

### 2. Don't carry a cell phone in your pocket

Even when a cell phone is not in use, it emits radiation.

### 3. Beware of weak signal

When a cell phone is in standby mode or when the signal strength is weak or blocked, exposure to radiation increases. Limit use at this time.

### 4. Keep it away from children

Studies consistently show that children are especially vulnerable to the effects of cell phone radiation. Generally, the younger the child, the more at risk they are.

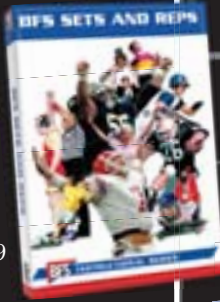
### 5. Don't leave a cell phone on your nightstand

You may be sleeping, but your cell phone is busy emitting radiation.

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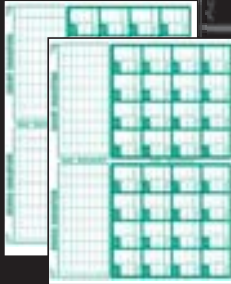
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