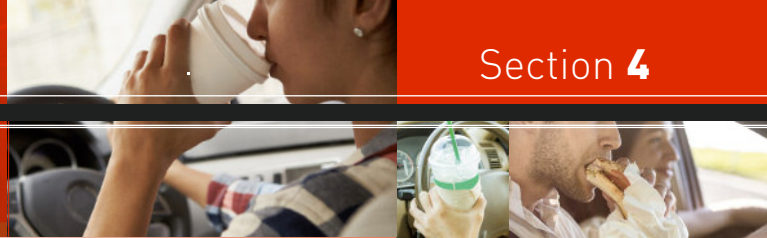


Eating at the wheel



Q1: Within the past year, have you eaten food you opened/unwrapped yourself while driving?

More than a quarter of people questioned admitted they had driven while eating food they had unwrapped themselves in the last year. Drivers aged 25 – 34 were the biggest offenders, more than half (55%) admitted to unwrapping and eating at the wheel at least once in the last year. More than two in five in this age group do this regularly, at least once a month.

Age Band	Total %	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Yes, once a week or more	4.3	12.2	16.6	2.7	3.8	1.2	1.5
Yes, about once a month	6.8	8.5	25.8	9.6	5.3	3.4	1.5
Yes, less than once a month	3.4	11.3	1.9	4.4	2.0	5.0	0
Yes, once or twice	12.6	9.6	10.2	23.5	12.1	7.7	15.3
No, never	72.9	58.4	45.5	59.8	76.8	82.6	81.7

THE FACTS:

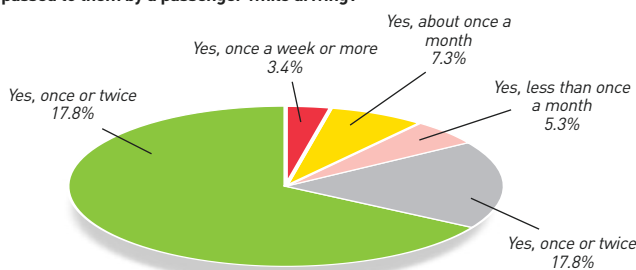
- Drivers who eat and drink at the wheel are twice as likely to crash¹.
- The crash risk is even higher if the food is hot, messy or you have to unwrap it yourself².
- Eating and drinking while driving diverts attention away from the driving task, increasing reaction times by up to 44%, meaning drivers will respond to hazards much more slowly³.
- It also causes physical distraction, as at least one hand is off the wheel holding food or drink⁴.

Q2: Within the past year, have you eaten food opened/unwrapped and passed to you by a passenger while driving?

More than four in ten drivers questioned by Brake and Direct Line admitted they had eaten at the wheel in the last year when the food had been unwrapped and passed to them by someone else. This figure rose to around half, for drivers aged 44 and under. The numbers were much lower for older drivers, dropping to around a quarter in the over 55 categories.

Age Band	Total %	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Yes, once a week or more	3.4	5.3	19.9	3.4	1	1.7	0
Yes, about once a month	7.3	15.8	18	10.5	9.1	1.3	3.4
Yes, less than once a month	5.3	13.7	7.8	7.4	3	4.5	3.2
Yes, once or twice	17.8	14.1	11.8	25.4	18.9	17	16.6
No, never	66.3	51	42.6	53.3	68	75.5	76.8

Figure 1: Within the past year, have people have eaten food opened/unwrapped and passed to them by a passenger while driving?



ADVICE FOR DRIVERS:

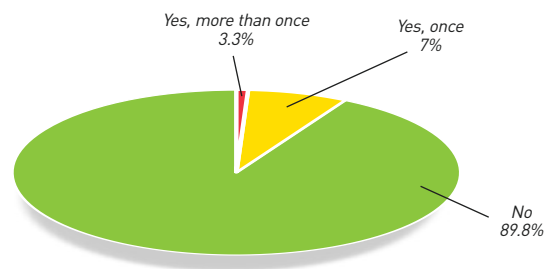
- Eating and drinking on the move might seem harmless but research shows it impacts on your ability to react quickly.
- Eating at the wheel often means taking your eyes, hands and mind off the road, and it only takes a small lapse in concentration for a devastating crash to occur.
- If you really need to eat during a journey, pull over somewhere safe to do so. This will also be a good opportunity to stretch out and clear your head.
- Eating should be a pleasure, so try your best to take the time out to savour your meals when you're not driving.

Q3: Within the past year, have you had a near miss (e.g. had to brake or swerve suddenly to avoid a hazard) because you were distracted by food or drink?

On average one in 10 drivers confessed they had experienced a near miss because they were eating or drinking at the wheel. That figure is hugely influenced by the large number of drivers aged 25 – 34 affected. The number was 40 percent in the age group. The number of near misses for drivers over 55 linked to eating or drinking at the wheel was tiny – between 0.5 and 3%.

Age Band	Total %	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Yes, more than once	3.3	7.1	16.8	3.1	3.4	0	0
Yes, once	7	17.1	23.9	12.7	4.1	2.7	0.5
No	89.8	75.8	59.3	84.2	92.5	97.3	99.5

Figure 2: Within the past year, people who have had a near miss because they were distracted by food or drink?



Eating at the wheel

LOST LIVES

Off-duty firefighter and dad of two, Joseph Wilkins was cycling when he was knocked down and killed on a country road near Abingdon in May 2012. The driver was eating a sandwich at the wheel and convicted of causing death by careless driving. Joe's partner Nicci Saunders said: *"Joe was a kind, caring, loving, father and my best friend. He was in training to cycle from Lands End to John O'Groats and had completed the same ride twice that week. He went out on 24th May with a friend to do the ride again. He kissed his 2 young children goodnight, kissed me goodbye and went out. The next time I saw him he was lying dead in a road after being hit by a car at 60 miles an hour, breaking his neck. To tell a two and a five year old that their daddy will never be coming home again is still the worst thing I have ever had to do in my life."*

Joe was cycling down a straight road on a beautiful sunny day when Paul Brown was distracted by eating a sandwich while driving. He had over 13 seconds to see Joe, but didn't, and ploughed straight into his back wheel, killing him instantly.



The thought that he lost his life was inconceivable but to find out it was due to someone eating made it feel even more of a loss. This just should not have happened.

I see people all the time eating and drinking in cars and by doing this taking their eyes off the road. Just a couple of seconds can take another person's life and put hurt in to a family that never goes away. It's been four and a half years now, yet he is still missed as much now as he was on that first day. The girls, as they get older understand more what they are missing without having their dad around and all because someone couldn't wait to get home to eat."

End notes

1. *Crash dieting: The effects of eating and drinking on driving performance, Accident Analysis & Prevention, 2008*
2. *The ten most dangerous foods to eat while driving, insure.com, 2009*
3. *Driving with one hand on the wheel - a fatal distraction, University of Leeds, 2012*
4. *Driving with one hand on the wheel - a fatal distraction, University of Leeds, 2012*

