

Cell Phones and Cancer - A New Reason to Worry?

by Dr. Delia Chiaramonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



A prominent scientist at the University of Pittsburgh has recently re-raised concerns that cell phone use may contribute to brain cancer. Ronald Herberman, M.D., the director of the University of Pittsburgh's cancer centers, sent an internal memo to his staff expressing his concern about cell phone safety and providing specific guidelines for lowering risk.

In his memo, entitled "Important Precautionary Advice Regarding Cell Phone Use," Dr. Herberman states "recently I have become aware of the growing body of literature linking long-term cell phone use to possible adverse effects including cancer." He notes that the evidence is still controversial, but says that he is convinced that the available data is sufficient to warrant caution.

Dr. Herberman's suggestions include:

- Children should avoid cell phones whenever possible since their developing organs may be more sensitive to electromagnetic radiation.
- When using a cell phone, try to keep it away from your body as much as possible. Even keeping the phone 2 inches away from your head decreases your exposure significantly. Use a headset whenever possible.
- Avoid carrying your cell phone on your body at all times and do not keep it too close while you are sleeping. If you must keep it on you, orient the phone with the keypad towards your body so that the transmitted electromagnetic fields move away from you instead of through you.
- Try to keep your conversations short and switch sides while you are speaking.
- Wait until the person you've called has picked up before you put the phone to your ear.
- Avoid using your cell phone when you have a weak signal or are driving in a car, bus or train. The signal is increased as the phone tries repeatedly to connect to a new relay station.

Not everyone agrees with Dr. Herberman's recommendations. Other experts cite conflicting evidence – some research suggests a possible link between cell phone use and cancer, while other studies show no such connection.

So how can we interpret this difference of opinion? The general party line seems to be 'we don't have overwhelming evidence that cell phones are bad so don't worry about it for now.' Many experts agree that more studies are needed to tease out any risk, if it

exists. On the other hand, Dr. Herberman's attitude seems to be 'there is some evidence that cell phones can be dangerous so let's take some precautions just in case.'

Should we believe Dr. Herberman's assessment or write him off as an over-reactive nervous Nellie? It is hard to say. His qualifications do check out: he is an internationally recognized tumor immunologist and vice chancellor for cancer research at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. He has won multiple awards for his work and is well respected by his peers. Yet there are many well-respected scientists who feel that he has jumped the gun.

Esteemed scientists don't usually make written pronouncements out of neurosis alone. I imagine that Dr. Herberman knows something that the rest of us don't know, so I am inclined to give his advice some credence. I look forward to more research and more clarity.

In the meantime, I'm not planning to throw away my cell phone just yet. But I do think I'll dig out my headset for those particularly long conversations.

How about you?

Be well,

Dr. C

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(photo courtesy of telephoneart.com)

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