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Walking With Your Back to Traffic

The word pedestrian, from the Latin *pedester* 'going on foot,' means a person walking along a road or in a developed area. People don't walk as much as they used to. "Why walk when you can drive?" says my friend, Matt.

As a result of all this driving about, the knowledge of how to be a good pedestrian is disappearing. It's not uncommon these days to see people walking in the street with their backs to traffic. Even when there are sidewalks, they still choose to share the road with the cars and trucks. That's risky behavior unless they have eyes in the back of their heads.

As a first step to being an informed pedestrian, let's talk physics. Physics, of course, is the branch of science concerned with the nature and properties of matter and energy. It comes into play when two objects collide—like your body and a car. The average adult weighs 155 pounds and the average car weighs 4,000 pounds. With a little imagination, you can see the likely result. Cars always win.

Walking in the street is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to bad pedestrian habits that will get you killed. Add to the list everything from stepping into the street from between two parked cars to jaywalking. To help you get off on the right foot, here are a few dos and don'ts to consider the next time you're hoofing it.

Pedestrian Dos and Don'ts

1. Stay close to the edge and *face* traffic when walking on a road with no sidewalks so drivers can see you and you can see them. Make sure you have room to step off the road as cars pass. Walk in single file if you're in a group.
2. Don't step into the road from between parked cars. People can't see you.
3. Cross at the corner, not in the middle of the block.

4. Cross with traffic. If there's a traffic light, wait until it's green. Just because the light's green doesn't mean it's safe. Look first.
5. Never walk diagonally across an intersection, otherwise known as "jaywalking."
6. Take the shortest route when crossing the road—straight across.
7. Wear bright colored or reflective clothing at dusk and at night.
8. Avoid walking in tunnels, on expressways, and on railroad tracks. They are especially dangerous places because no one expects to see you there.
9. Walk on the sidewalk instead of the road when there's a choice.
10. Use common sense.

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