

Digital Addiction

Technology addiction is defined as the frequent and obsessive use of technology resulting in negative consequences for the user. While experts still debate whether excessive digital use constitutes a true addiction, unchecked use of electronic devices can definitely be detrimental.

Symptoms include:

- Impaired focus and increased distraction.
- Caring more about virtual relationships than actual ones.
- Compulsive gaming, shopping, gambling or stock trading.
- FOMO (fear of missing out) on the latest trending topics.
- Concealing internet use.
- Withdrawal symptoms (e.g., anxiety, restlessness) when offline.
- Deteriorating performance at school or work.
- Worsening communication and recognition of facial or nonverbal cues.
- Impulsivity or problems regulating emotions.
- Diminished time spent on other activities.
- Feeling isolated, lonely or stressed.
- Using the internet to escape from negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression).
- Phubbing (snubbing) others by using a smartphone during social occasions, such as meals.
- Decreased attention to basic needs, such as sleep, exercise or a healthy diet.

If these symptoms seem familiar to you, consider how your internet and smart device use is affecting you. Smartphones can be particularly tricky because of their easy accessibility; here are strategies to reduce the undesirable effects:

- **Try a digital detox:** Reduce or eliminate use of electronics for a specified period of time.
- **Delete social media apps** from your phone so you can only access them on your computer.
- **Leave your device** outside the bedroom at bedtime.
- **Curtail checking habits** by only using devices at designated, limited time slots.
- **Use cognitive behavioral therapy** to address resistant internet habits.
- **Designate digital-free times** and areas, such as the dinner table and while driving.
- **Set goals**, such as allowing yourself a certain amount of internet use once you have completed a chore.
- **Monitor your digital use** by keeping a log of time spent online for non-essential activities.
- **Use offline time** for enjoyable or productive activities. Rekindle an old interest, go outside or play with children or pets.

What About Kids?

Watch out for these red flags for digital addiction in children:

- Declining grades.
- Poor concentration and drowsiness during school.
- Extensive late-night device use.
- Diminished interest in friends or activities.
- Substantial bills for online activities.
- Withdrawal symptoms (pacing, irritability).

To seek more balance:

- Limit online access, especially at night.
- Create an online schedule jointly with older children.
- Identify the cause (e.g., depression, bullying, loneliness).
- Seek out free helplines.
- Avoid a battle of wills; problem-solve together.
- Introduce kids to positive online activities: art, blogging, virtual travel, pen pals, craft ideas, etc.
- Praise signs of progress.
- Seek professional help if your child persistently resists efforts to manage device usage.



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