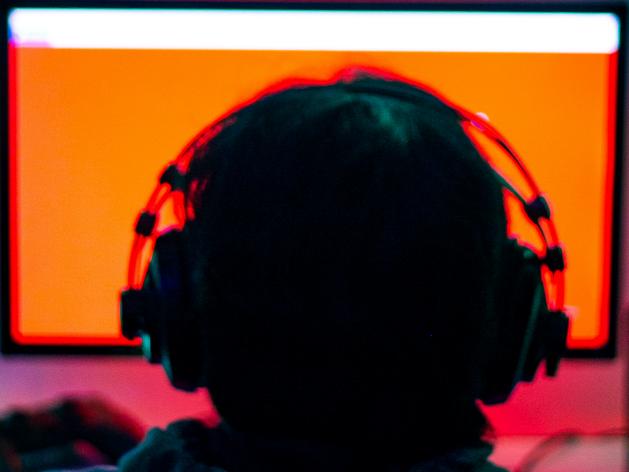# TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION

A guide for one of the most commonly ignored addictions

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What is Technology Addiction?

Technology addiction, also called digital addiction, internet addiction, or internet use disorder, is a term used to refer to **obsessive behavior related to technology.**

Types of technology addiction:

- **Gaming addiction**

- **Social media addiction**

- **Phone addiction**

- **Internet addiction**

- **Online gambling addiction**

- **Pornography addiction**

- **Online shopping addiction**

Statistics

88.5%
of Americans use the internet

75%
of Americans use a smart phone, tablet or mobile device to get online

40%
of young adults (ages 18-24) use social media in the bathroom

36.7%
of people in China had internet addiction in 2020

2.8%
of people in China had severe internet addiction in 2020

Signs and Symptoms

- **Inability to moderate or abstain** from technology or a specific digital medium.
- **Preoccupation** with thinking about using technological devices.
- **Compulsive** technological use or experiencing **cravings and urges** to use digital devices.
- **Neglecting important life areas** such as work, school or relationships at the expense of technology.
- **Continuing** to use digital devices **despite** it contributing to **consequences** in your life.
- **Losing interest** in social and leisure activities that you once enjoyed at the expense of technology.
- Using digital devices in **dangerous situations** such as while driving a car or walking across a city street.
- Experiencing **unwanted mental health symptoms** such as depression, anxiety, stress or irritability at the expense of technological usage.
- Using digital devices to **induce pleasure** or experience **gratification**.
- **Lying or hiding digital usage** from family, friends or colleagues as a result of guilt or shame.
- Using digital devices for **longer durations than intended** or finding yourself using digital devices with **increased frequency over time.**

Behavioral Addiction

- Also known as **non substance use addictions**
- Characterized by a progressive inability to control, regulate, or limit a behavior.
- **Substance use addictions** are characterized by inability to control, regulate, or limit their use of a substance.

Substance use addictions

- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Cannabis
- Hallucinogens
- Inhalants
- Opioids
- Sedatives, hypnotics, and anxiolytics
- Stimulants
- Tobacco

Behavioral addictions

- Technology
- Sex/Love
- Food (binge eating disorder)
- Gambling
- Shopping
- Plastic surgery
- Risky behavior

Prevention

In order to prevent yourself from becoming too addicted to your technology, it is important to develop healthy technology habits.

1. Limit your usage

While driving
Before sleep
Use social media wisely
- Don't judge yourself based on other's posts.
- Create time limits and schedule your free time.

2. Manage notifications

Be realistic about which applications actually need notifications.

3. Manage expectations

You should not be expected to be on your device all the time. Let others know when you are available.

4. Be present

Don't let devices distract you in social settings.

5. Take time to recharge

Don't rely on your device for relaxation. Technology is stimulating.
Learn how to sit with your thoughts and be comfortable in your brain.

Stigma

Behavioral addictions are thought to be less harmful than substance use addictions.

- Substance use addictions: negative consequences are easy to notice.

- Behavioral addictions: negative consequences seem normal or more gradual.

- Addictive activities are engaged in without caution when we think they are normal parts of our lives.

Obtaining treatment is difficult

- Other than gambling, behavioral addictions are not considered official clinical disorders yet.

- There is no official diagnosis to give to insurance providers.

- Mental health professionals have to diagnose patients with another disorder to obtain insurance coverage.

The Technology Dilemma

What makes technology addiction different?

- Technology has become necessary.

- We need to learn how to use our devices effectively to be successful.

- We can quit other things we are addicted to, but we cannot quit technology.

What does this mean for treatment?

- Substance use addiction recovery usually involves going cold turkey.

- Technology addiction recovery usually involves developing a healthy relationship with your devices.

Why is parenting so hard these days?

- Raising children with technology is a new challenge.

- Technology has made it easy for parents to keep children occupied. **!!THIS IS NOT HEALTHY!!**

- Constant technology use can lead to difficulties concentrating in school and other activities.

- Parents can foster healthy use by using the prevention strategies in this toolkit.

- Young children who learn these strategies can develop healthy technology habits as adults.

Treatment Options

Therapy

- Individual or Group
- Once per week sessions
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Dialectical behavior therapy
- Motivational interviewing

IOP (Intensive Outpatient Program)

- More intensive than therapy
- More than once per week
- 3-5 hours a day
- Can maintain daily routines
- Combination group therapy and individual therapy

PHP (Partial Hospitalization Program)

- More intensive than IOP
- 5-6 hours a day
- Cannot maintain daily routines
- Non residential
- Structured program of outpatient psychiatric services

Residential

- Most intense
- Usually at least 1 month
- Clinicians can directly monitor your technology use
- Do not need to rely on your own willpower during treatment

Helpful Resources

- Not many treatment programs tailored specifically for technology addiction yet.

- Most available programs focus on addiction as a whole.

- You might be in groups with patients dealing with other addictions such as substance use or gambling.

- There are some programs available now that are tailored specifically to technology use.

An IOP dedicated to helping adolescents and adults through technology addiction and other mental health illnesses.

An application that helps track phone usage and set time limits

A web browser extension that allows you to block unproductive sites and provides warnings and recommendations when it thinks you are wasting your time.

Author's Note

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I am a senior at The College of New Jersey studying psychology and planning to become a therapist or counselor. Technology use is something I have struggled with since I was young. At first, it was difficult to see it as an issue because it did not have any major consequences. My grades in school were good and I was using technology as a way to connect with my friends. Due to my lack of recognition of this problem, my overuse of technology grew and grew until I no longer had control of it and it took control of me. It wasn't until I started missing assignments and failing classes in college that I knew this was a real issue that needed more intensive help. I went to an IOP over the summer and the clinicians there helped me take control of my life and develop healthy technology habits. I am glad I went on this mental health journey. It has given me newfound knowledge of the mental health field and a drive to help those struggling with similar issues.

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