Internet Addiction: Are You a Net Junkie?

While the mental health field debates whether one can truly become “addicted” to the Internet, there is no denying there are those whose use can be considered excessive. And that excess can lead to serious consequences.

THE CONSEQUENCES
While time doesn’t necessarily define the problem, those who are “addicted” generally report using the Internet for substantial amounts of time. Needless to say, something’s got to give with only 24 hours in a day, and that something is typically sleep. Sleep deprivation can cause extreme fatigue, impairing academic or occupational functioning. It can also compromise the immune system, resulting in greater vulnerability to illness. Excessive Internet use can even impact social relationships, and managers increasingly report issues in the workplace as well.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO CURB YOUR INTERNET USE
If you are concerned about your level of Internet use, the following strategies can help you set some reasonable limits.

- Disrupt your routine. Identify your general pattern of Internet usage – and change it! For example, if your established routine is to check e-mail first thing in the morning, shower or eat breakfast first. If you never take breaks while net-surfing, self-enforce breaks every 30 minutes.

- Let commitments help set boundaries. Use concrete responsibilities or commitments as prompts for logging off. If you are responsible to get your children off to school, for instance, set a timer so you can be certain to log off in time.

- Set goals for your usage. Determine the number of hours you use the Internet in a week. Then set a reasonable goal for reducing that number. Schedule the number of hours into your planner, keeping sessions brief, but frequent. The tangible scheduling will provide a sense of being in control, while helping to reduce any discomfort experienced from decreasing your usage.

- Make a list. Compile a list of the five main problems caused by your Internet use and the five major benefits of curbing it. Write them down and keep the list with you. Whenever you reach a moment at which you are tempted to log on instead of attending to something more productive, review your list as a reminder.

GETTING HELP
For confidential help with personal or workplace issues, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Services are confidential and offered to you and your eligible household family members.

1-800-342-8111 www.HorizonCareLink.com
Login: LACCD
Password: eap
Home Internet Safety

Computers have virtually become a staple in the classroom, and there is no doubt the Internet is an invaluable resource for tracking homework tasks, researching school reports, communicating with other kids – and of course – playing interactive games. But that ease of access also comes with its hazards. For example, seemingly innocent words can expose your child to pornographic material. Say your 8-year old is researching the history of “Lego” blocks, but accidentally types in “legs” instead. S/he will be directed to numerous sites focusing on legs – some of which may be pornographic. Innocent conversations via online chats can also expose children to predators who frequent such sites.

What concrete steps can you take as a parent to protect your child from the dangers of the Internet? Practice the “Three O’s” to establish the strongest safety net possible.

• Open communication: Educate your children about the dangers and your concerns - and ask them come to you if they are subjected to material or conversations that make them uncomfortable.

• On-line resources: While no option can promise complete safety, there are online tools that restrict access to adult material and help protect children from predators. Many Internet Service Providers (ISP’s) offer parental control options and software is available for filtering sites or preventing personal information from being disseminated. Other programs monitor and track online activity.

• Overseer internet activity: Be aware of what your child sees and hears on the Internet, who they meet, and what they share about themselves online.

Additional precautions may include:

• Take an active role in protecting your children online. Become computer literate and learn how to block objectionable material.

• Spend time online together with your child to teach appropriate online behavior.

• Keep the computer in a common area, where its use can be easily monitored.

• Have your child create a screen name to protect his/her real identity.

• Disable “cookies,” internal tracking devices that track information on the user’s site history, shopping preferences and more.

• Monitor your credit card and phone bills for unfamiliar charges.

• Research the online protection offered by your child’s school, after-school center, friends’ homes, or other places where computer use may be unsupervised.

• Take your child seriously if a threatening or uncomfortable online exchange is reported.

• Report the transmission of child pornography to local law enforcement, and call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (800-843-5678).

GETTING HELP

Take advantage of your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support and information with personal or workplace issues. Services are confidential and offered to employees and their eligible household members.
According to research done by the National Telecommunications and Information Agency (and other research data), those in the 50+ age bracket represent a rapidly rising segment of the population of Internet users. In 2001, 37.1% of people in this age group reported using the Internet, compared with only 19.3% in 1998. That’s a 92% increase in only three years! As the computer-literate population ages, and as older adults increasingly try their hand at computer technology, these figures will undoubtedly continue to rise.

THE BENEFITS
So much of the technology can be especially beneficial to older adults. E-mail and instant messaging connect friends and loved ones across the miles, and provide quick responses to questions. Online banking makes checking on account balances, transferring funds, and paying bills so convenient – saving time and money! Shopping via the Internet can be a valuable benefit to those who can no longer drive, or who have mobility challenges. Social networking sites can reduce the sense of isolation many seniors experience, and allow extended families to stay in touch. Families can blog and share the latest photos or videos of a child’s first birthday party, or the most recent vacation. The relatively small cost of the Internet connection (usually $20-$40/month) brings benefits that make the expense more than worthwhile.

TIPS FOR TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE INTERNET
• Internet classes abound for users at all levels. They are offered by most public libraries (usually at no cost), online, through senior centers, and other avenues.

• Search engines, such as Google or Lycos, allow the user to research virtually anything under the sun. For effective searches use keywords that are as specific as possible. Add related terms or additional keywords as well. There are also handy reference tools such as online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and even an online Thesaurus.

• Do not respond to unsolicited e-mails from unknown senders, as criminals attempt to use the Internet just as they do the telephone. The most popular scams are “get rich working from home,” “you’ve won the lottery,” or the standard pyramid schemes.

• When shopping on the Internet, look for sites that have the following:
  • Adequate address and contact information (not simply a PO box number);
  • Itemized cost incurred for the product/service, including delivery charges, postage and handling;
  • Details about the security protection for online payment;
  • Return, refund and exchange policy information; and
  • A privacy policy and complaint process.

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Horizon Health
Many of us are so accustomed to the ease and convenience of getting information from the Internet that we may not stop to think about it when we copy or take notes as we do our research.

In fact, copying information from the Internet – just like copying from a book – or any other source – is plagiarism and may even violate copyright law. Here are some important facts:

- Copying somebody else’s work, without giving the person credit or providing a citation, is plagiarism. Some online materials state that they may not be copied without specific authorization.
- Using another person’s work (including writings, songs, videos, and more) without getting that person’s permission (and paying that person if appropriate) may constitute copyright infringement.
- Downloading a song, movie, video, or computer program for free from sites other than those sponsored by the copyright owner, may be viewed as piracy.
- Plagiarism, copyright infringement, and piracy are against the law, and may carry criminal penalties and/or fines.

Here are some general rules for using material from the Internet:

- Always be sure to give credit to the author or source of information or materials from the Internet.
- If the source or author has specified how he or she wants (or doesn’t want) the material used, be sure to comply.
- If in doubt about using something you found on the Internet, contact the author, artist, or other source. Ask for permission to use the material or information. When you do this, it is recommended that you specify how it will be used. Be sure to keep a copy of your request for permission and, if you get it, the note or email granting you permission. These steps can protect you if there is ever any controversy about your usage.
- Naturally, if you are denied permission, do not go ahead and use the materials.

Also remember that:

- All materials on the Internet are copyrighted, even if you do not see a copyright sign (©).
- Just because something is copyrighted, that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s correct!

The bottom line: beware before you copy! It is always safer and more respectful of others’ work to read and learn from your research, and then put the information into your own words.

You can learn more information about copyright laws by going to the United States Patent and Trademark Office at www.uspto.gov.

GETTING HELP

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides assistance to help you deal with legal matters you may be facing. All calls are confidential, and services are offered to employees and their family members.
Affording a Computer

With the mainstreaming and evolution of technology, computers are vastly more affordable than in the early days. Add to that the competition in the retail sector due to the economy, and there are good deals out there for the taking. But for those who may be dipping their toes into technology for the first time, where do you start?

THREE BASIC DECISIONS

1. First, determine which type of computer will best meet your needs: a desktop or a laptop. Desktop systems are often less expensive, but as laptops have increased in popularity, they have become more affordable, too. If you travel frequently or dream of computing while relaxing in the park, perhaps a laptop is in the cards for you.

2. Second, do you prefer the Windows PC or Mac (Macintosh) operating system? Both have pros and cons and both have advanced tremendously. Many find the Mac system more user-friendly, while others swear by Windows. Try out both types of systems and talk to other computer users to help in making this decision.

3. Finally, what are the primary functions you plan to use? If you just need the basics - word processing, e-mail, and cooking up a spreadsheet or two -- this will significantly lower the price you can expect to pay. On the other hand, if you are into video games, downloading music, scanning and storing high resolution photographs, and the like -- you will need a higher end model. This could potentially increase the price.

READY, SET, SHOP!

Once you’ve made the basic decisions and given some thought to components such as processing speed, memory storage, and external drives, it’s time to shop. Check out offerings on comparable models from retail chains specializing in electronics, big box discount stores, online electronics outlets, and more. On any given day, you are likely to land a great deal on what you have in mind.

AND THERE’S MORE

The options don’t end there. Many retailers offer discounts on refurbished models. With a good warranty included, this may be a great option. Retailers also sell their display models at a discount to make room for newer inventory. And don’t forget the second-hand outlets. Some, such as Goodwill, have programs for re-cycling and upgrading donated computers, and then selling them at significant discounts. And it’s a win-win - you’re getting a great deal on a computer, and helping someone develop marketable job skills at the same time!

GETTING HELP

For confidential help with personal or workplace issues, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). All calls are confidential, and services are offered to employees and their eligible household members.
Have you ever stopped to think about what a great tool you have at your disposal for protecting and improving your health? It’s your computer! The Internet is packed with information about health topics for ages zero to 92 – and everyone in between.

A note of caution, however, is in order. It’s almost human nature to rely on the truth of the written word – and many automatically extend that trust to the Internet. When it comes to important information – a number of questions are in order. Where is the information coming from? Who are the people distributing the information, and what is the motivation? What are their credentials? These are just a few of the questions you may want to ask in researching health topics online. After all, something very important is at stake – your health!

According to the Health on the Net Foundation (HON), there are eight components to look for in a site disseminating health information:

- The material should be informative.
- The purpose of the website should be stated.
- Your interaction with the site should be confidential.
- The materials should be referenced and dated.
- Information regarding treatments should describe the pros and cons, and the benefits should be supported with evidence.
- The website states who or what organization provides its funding.
- Any advertising is clearly labeled as such.
- There is a means to contact the site owners.

**KEY QUESTIONS**

What is the source of the information? Beyond the source and credentials of the information’s author, check the “About Us” section for information on the organization that created and maintains the site. Many health information sites have an Editorial Board which evaluates the material. What are their credentials? How often is the information reviewed and updated?

**What is the purpose of the website?**

Is the organization committed to education, research, or selling a product? Understanding the site’s mission can help determine if there is anything to be gained by promoting one point of view over another. If the information is provided by a company with something to sell, it doesn’t mean it should be automatically rejected. But it is important to keep this in mind as you evaluate the information.

**Is the information current?**

When was the information last updated? New insights and treatments are being discovered almost every day. Therefore making sure you have current information is critical.

Finally, never use information you find on the web as a substitute for a visit to your healthcare professional. Your provider knows you -- the website doesn’t!

**GETTING HELP**

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides an array of services to help you improve your health and become a wise consumer. Services are confidential and offered to employees and their eligible household members.
**JUNE 2009**

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Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can offer additional help and recommend appropriate resources.

The EAP is confidential and voluntary. It offers professional assessment, short-term counseling, and referral services for you and your eligible household family members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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