

Addicted to the Screen: Causes, Consequences, and Cures for Technology Addiction

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Technology saves lives. The wonders of technology have brought humans to places never before dreamed. From lifesaving medical innovations to global connectivity that allows us to communicate instantly across entire continents, Technology has transformed nearly every facet of human existence. With the tap of a screen or the click of a button, we can access an unfathomable amount of information, connect with loved ones, and even automate labor-intensive tasks. In fields like medicine, education, and engineering, technology has accelerated advancements, reduced human suffering, and brought about possibilities that were once thought to only be science fiction.

But, with such a powerful tool, there needs to be a second edge to this sword. The rapid integration of technology into our daily lives has introduced a world of new challenges. Over 50% of Americans believe they are addicted to their phones (Center for Internet & Technology Addiction), highlighting the extent to which technology has become central to daily routines, social interactions, and even our identities. This phenomenon, often referred to as technology addiction, describes our increasing dependency on digital devices, social media, and the internet, a dependency that has raised growing concern in recent years. This rise just goes to show how deeply embedded these devices have become in our lives, altering our habits, work routines, and social dynamics. Technology's dual role as both a tool and a potential source of addiction reveals the need to assess not only its benefits but also its consequences on mental and physical well-being.

So, what is technology addiction? Well, technology addiction refers to the compulsive and excessive use of digital devices or platforms, leading to an interference with everyday life, mental health, and well-being. Much like substance abuse or gambling addiction, technology addiction involves behaviors that stimulate the brain's reward system, causing the release of dopamine—a neurotransmitter linked to pleasure and reward. This chemical response can lead to a repetitive cycle, where individuals feel compelled to check their devices, scroll through social media, or play games for extended periods, despite negative impacts on their lives. Unlike addictions to substances like drugs or alcohol, technology addiction doesn't have a physical dependency but is similar in its capacity to produce compulsive behavior patterns and emotional distress when the user isn't using it. People experiencing technology addiction may exhibit withdrawal symptoms, like irritability, anxiety, and restlessness, when they're away from their

devices, a response seen in both behavioral and substance-related addictions. The “addictive” nature of technology can be accredited partly to its design, since many platforms are specifically engineered to keep users coming back through features like push notifications and content recommendations, making it harder and harder to disengage.

Technology addiction comes in many different shapes and sizes. Some of these are social media addiction, gaming addiction, smartphone addiction, and internet or information addiction. Social media addiction is when people feel a strong need to use social media platforms, (Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, etc.) so much that it starts to interfere with real-life responsibilities and relationships. People with social media addiction spend a lot of time posting, tracking likes or views, and comparing themselves to others. This addiction is fed by likes and comments that the user sends or receives, giving them dopamine every time. The fact that social media apps are always available makes it easy to keep using them, and this can lead to “FOMO” (fear of missing out) and feelings of jealousy or insecurity from the constant comparisons of themselves and their lives to others.

Gaming addiction, also known as gaming disorder, is when someone spends so much time playing video games that it affects their health, relationships, or daily life. Lots of games are designed to keep players coming back with exciting stories, rewards, and daily challenges. Multiplayer games and mobile games are especially addictive because they let players connect with others, compete, and feel accomplished. For some, gaming addiction can mess up sleep schedules, lead to health issues, and put a strain on relationships.

Smartphone addiction, sometimes called “nomophobia” (fear of being without one’s phone), is an excessive need to use a smartphone and to feel connected all the time. People with smartphone addiction often check their notifications, messages, and apps compulsively, even when it’s not necessary. Since smartphones have social media, games, messaging, and news all in one place, they make it easy for people to develop different types of addictions. Because smartphones are always nearby, it’s easy for people to rely on them constantly for information, entertainment, and staying connected.

Internet or information addiction is the urge to constantly consume information online, often by endlessly scrolling through news sites, blogs, or forums. This addiction is fueled by easy access to endless information, leading people to feel they must always be updated. Information

addiction can make it hard to focus, lower productivity, and affect mental well-being, creating a cycle of always searching for more content without feeling truly satisfied.

In each of these types, there's a blurred line between dependency and addiction. Dependency is a high level of attachment to a device or app, often because it's important to one's daily routine or work. Addiction, on the other hand, implies a more problematic level of dependency, where the compulsion to use technology negatively impacts other areas of life. Recognizing and understanding this difference is very important for understanding technology addiction.

Technology addiction may be more likely to develop in people with particular personality features and mental health conditions. Impulsivity, social anxiety, and low self-esteem are among the traits that are often linked with an increased likelihood of developing a dependence on technology. For example, people with social anxiety might turn to social media as a way to interact without face-to-face contact, making it easier to communicate without fear. But, when they become to depend on digital networks for social interaction, this can also result in overuse. The way the brain's reward system functions is another important factor that contributes to technology addiction. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter that gives us joy, may be released whenever someone receives a message, a like, or a notification. People may eventually develop a yearning for that dopamine rush, which will cause them to check their phones, access social media, or play games even more frequently. It can be challenging to break this cycle of looking for rewards, which can result in addictive-like behaviors.

Social validation is another big factor in technology addiction. Getting likes, comments, or followers on social media can make people feel good about themselves, as if they're receiving social approval. This validation can drive people to keep posting, sharing, and interacting online, hoping for more positive feedback. For some, it becomes a way of measuring their self-worth, which only worsens their dependency on these platforms. Peer pressure and social expectations also have an impact on technology addiction. Being constantly online or following social media trends can seem normal because practically everyone uses technology in some way. Intentionally, friends and family may put pressure on others to maintain relationships by expecting frequent interaction with posts or fast text responses. A high level of involvement is also rewarded by

society; for young people especially, feeling "in the know" or being involved online can feel essential.

Another big cause of technology addiction is the way tech companies design their products. Lots of apps, games, and platforms are specifically created to keep users coming back. For example, companies use algorithms that learn what we like to watch, read, or interact with, so they can show us more of the same things, keeping us hooked. Features like infinite scrolling, autoplay videos, and personalized notifications are all designed to make it easy to keep users' attention for longer periods of time. The business model of lots of tech companies also relies on keeping people online as much as possible. For example, social media and streaming platforms make money from ads, and the more time people spend on these platforms, the more ads they can show, which brings in more money. This profit-driven cycle drives companies to create products that are addictive by design. Since their success depends on high user engagement, they're motivated to find new ways to keep people's attention, even if it means increasing the risk of their addiction to their products.

Technology addiction can have severe effects on mental health. Overuse of technology is often associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. For instance, constant comparisons on social media might cause low self-esteem because users may begin to believe that their lives don't compare to the carefully polished pictures they see online. Also, when users grow dependent on these moments of approval for enjoyment, the dopamine loop triggered by constant alerts, likes, and comments can lead to mood swings. People may eventually become depressed if they aren't receiving the amount of attention they want online or become anxious when they aren't connected. Also, over time, the habit of constantly switching between digital tasks lowers attention span, making it hard to focus at school or work.

Psychological issues are not the only ones involved with technology addiction. There are many physical effects, such as eye strain, headaches, and poor posture, often called "tech neck." Moreover, screen exposure, especially before bedtime, disrupts sleep cycles and can lead to insomnia. Additionally, the sedentary lifestyle encouraged by heavy tech use can increase risks for obesity and related health problems.

Relationships can also be strained by technology addiction because "phubbing," or ignoring people in favor of phones, makes loved ones feel unimportant. An over dependence on

virtual communication can result in social isolation, a decline in interpersonal skills, and the weakening of emotional connections. Because online interactions lack the depth of in-person relationships, this can worsen feelings of loneliness. And, for students and employees, technology addiction reduces productivity. Constant digital distractions can lead to lower grades for students and affect career growth for professionals. Constant interruptions make it harder to focus, leading to decreased quality of work and missed opportunities.

Addressing technology addiction requires a combined approach from individuals, society, policymakers, and tech companies. On an individual level, self-awareness and setting boundaries is very important. For some this is taking “digital detoxes,” like setting time limits for apps, creating “device-free zones,” or simply monitoring their technology use. Well-being can be greatly improved by using easy techniques like turning off notifications and limiting screen time at night. Also, “digital wellness” initiatives are being put into companies and schools to promote balanced tech use and help people in creating better relationships with their devices. Policymakers and technology companies also have a part to play. Businesses can create platforms that encourage mindful usage by encouraging breaks and providing tools to monitor screen time. Regulations to restrict addictive features for minors and implement screen-time warnings are being considered by policymakers. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is one therapeutic method that can help people with tech dependency identify triggers and develop ways to deal with them. By working together, we can strike a better balance with technology and lessen its negative effects on relationships, mental health, and day-to-day living.

In conclusion, technology has reshaped nearly every aspect of modern life, bringing remarkable advancements in areas like healthcare, communication, and education. From lifesaving innovations to global networks that connect people in an instant, its positive impact is undeniable. However, the increasing prevalence of technology addiction has raised serious concerns about its effects on mental health, relationships, and productivity. While individuals can take personal steps, like practicing self-awareness, setting app limits, and taking “digital detoxes,” to manage their use, the responsibility does not lie only with them.

Technology companies must be held accountable for designing platforms that prioritize profit over the wellbeing of their users. Features like infinite scrolling, autoplay, and targeted notifications are engineered to keep users engaged, often at the cost of their mental health.

Companies should focus on ethical design choices, including built-in tools for tracking and limiting screen time, as well as prompts that encourage mindful usage. Policymakers also play an important role in this effort, as they have the power to put regulations in place that could change the most addictive aspects of technology, especially for younger users. By holding tech companies accountable and promoting responsible tech use, we can work toward a balanced relationship with technology, one that preserves its benefits while minimizing its potential harm. Through a collaborative approach, we can help create a healthier digital landscape that supports instead of hurts our well-being.