

Digital Addiction: What Happens When We Cannot Disconnect [B2]

I social media e altre forme di intrattenimento digitale possono causare ansia, depressione e altri problemi di salute mentale. Uno specialista delle dipendenze approfondisce le cause e i sintomi di questo disturbo e spiega come evitarlo.

Your phone [pings](#) and you stop what you're doing to read the message you've just received. Then you spend an hour on social media, reading and reacting to posts. By the time you finish, you feel uncomfortable — not only about the hour that you've just wasted on your phone, but also about how exciting everybody else's life seems compared to yours. But instead of deleting your accounts, you go back on social media later that day, and then the next day, and then the next, spending more and more time online and feeling worse and worse. If this sounds like you, then it's likely you are suffering from digital addiction.

THE INTERNET

According to a report by the global agency We Are Social and the social media management platform Hootsuite, some five billion of the approximately eight billion people on the planet are connected to the internet. Of these, over 90 per cent use their phone to go online and spend on average six hours and 53 minutes there every day. Other studies have found a clear connection between heavy internet use — specifically, social media use — and increased feelings of depression, anxiety and other mental health problems.

MODERN CONDITIONS

An expert on [behavioural-based](#) afflictions, Dr. Gregory Jantz is the best-selling author of over forty-five books, including Social Media and Depression: How to be Healthy and Happy in the Digital Age. He uses the

term 'digital addiction' to describe a compulsion to use any and all forms of digital media, including the internet, social media and gaming. Digital addiction is one of many [conditions](#) that he treats at his award-winning mental health centre A Place of HOPE. Located in Edmonds, in Washington state, the [facility](#) treats all forms of addiction, as well as depression, anxiety, eating disorders and [PTSD](#).

THE TREATMENT

To learn more about digital addiction and how to treat it, Speak Up met with Dr. Jantz. He began by saying that most of his patients come to the centre understanding that they have a problem, but rarely consider it an addiction.

Dr. Gregory Jantz (American accent): We don't really hear people saying, "Hey, can I get help for internet addiction?" But they'll say things like "My social media is out of control." So when somebody [checks in](#) with us and they are a new patient, we initially take away anything with a screen. And at about the third day, we start to see the traditional signs of addiction. "I've got a [headache](#). I've got to do one more email. You don't understand. [May I have back](#) my [device](#)?" They feel anxious. There is [are] even those that will have physical symptoms, like [sweaty](#) palms, [heart rate](#) goes up. It's controlling them. And [ultimately](#) there are consequences.

A VIRTUAL DRUG

Digital addiction refers to all kinds of compulsive online use. However, social media is by far the most addictive. Dr. Jantz explains why. **Dr. Gregory Jantz:** Sometimes it's referred to as kind of the cocaine of online. There are some who already probably have a tendency towards addictive behaviours. Social media is just the perfect storm, in that over time we know that it does alter our brain chemistry. We know that dopamine levels go up over time when we're overengaged. We also know by the design of social media that it does get us in these short [spurts](#), and we keep looking, and it's like we keep going on and on. And if I'm already a little bit fragile with maybe my self-esteem, we end up looking to social media to validate us as a person.

KEEP TRACK OF YOUR USE

Dr. Jantz says that most people vastly underestimate how much time they spend online. **Dr. Gregory Jantz:** If you ask somebody “Well, how much time did you spend on social media?”, they probably will say, “Oh, you know, not that much.” And they’ll say an hour. But in reality, it might have been three hours, because one of the indications [of digital addiction] is [that] you lose track of time. The other indication is: I can’t control my time. I may say, “Okay, thirty minutes, I’m going to get off.” We deny how much time we’re involved with it. We’re living kind of in a non-reality. We make excuses for our behaviour, and then we say, like any addiction, “Oh, it’s no big deal.” So, the more I’m engaged in social media, the worse I feel about myself.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

We then asked Dr. Jantz if he had any tips on controlling social media use. **Dr. Gregory Jantz:** The first one is, Can I control my time? Can I set my timer and honour it? And then, “What am I using social media for?” Some say, “Oh, family and friends,” and so forth. No, no. What am I really using it for? So, the question to ask yourself, “Have I ever done anything online or on social media that I later regret?”, and really be honest with yourself. I cannot begin to tell you how many folks have told me, “Oh, I’m so sorry. Some of the things I’ve said and done, I can’t believe it.” One of the tests to do is, can you pick a day a week, one day a week, where you can fast from social media, fast from all online activities? Can I do a day a week of detox successfully? And then the other thing to look at is the last hour before you go to bed, as far as good sleep hygiene [is concerned], will I be willing for the last hour to stay away from online activities? Those are a couple of checkpoints.

UNCLASSIFIED DISORDER

Despite its prevalence, digital addiction is not yet listed as a mental disorder in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM, as it is commonly known. **Dr. Gregory Jantz:** Maybe that’ll change in the future. I have seen gaming absolutely destroy lives. I just have to say that. I’ve seen it.

And I've seen a person's self-care go out the window. I have seen where they are really in the [depths](#) of despair as a result of gaming. The same would be true with social media. And so, maybe at some point there could be a diagnostic code for it.

Glossary

- **underestimate** = sottovalutare
- **conditions** = patologie, disturbi
- **facility** = struttura, istituto
- **checks in** = registrarsi
- **spurts** = impulsi
- **checkpoints** = punti di controllo
- **pings** = emettere un suono metallico
- **ultimately** = all fine
- **it's no big deal** = non è niente di che
- **so forth** = e così via
- **listed** = includere
- **headache** = mal di testa
- **you lose track of time** = perdere la cognizione del tempo
- **deny** = negare
- **fast** = digiunare
- **behavioural-based** = basato sul comportamento
- **honour** = rispettare
- **regret** = pentirsi
- **May I have back** = posso avere indietro...?
- **heart rate** = battito cardiaco
- **folks** = gente
- **PTSD** = disturbo da stress post-traumatico (post-traumatic stress disorder)
- **device** = dispositivo
- **sweaty** = sudato
- **depths** = profondità
- **detox** = disintossicarsi
- **I be willing** = essere disposto
- **Despite** = nonostante