



“Ethical obligations of apps to track screen time and late-night use”

Excessive screen time and app use can lead to physical and mental health problems

- “It found that youth who spent the most time on their digital technology were statistically more likely to exhibit higher levels of internalizing problems two years later. Internalizing problems include depression, anxiety, social anxiety, somatic complaints, and other concerns. This association between frequent screen time and mental health problems was mediated by specific changes in brain development.” - <https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/yale-study-probes-connection-between-excessive-screen-media-activity-and-mental-health-problems-in-youth/>
- It can also lead to problems with vision, sleeping, and neck, back, and hand pain

While I do acknowledge these potential risks and their seriousness, I do not believe it is the place of the apps being used to take them into consideration



People have different bodies and different needs

- For example, while some studies mention that screen time can lead to mindless eating and eating larger portion sizes, for some people excessive screen time can actually distract people from eating for a while
- What might be excessive screen time for some people might not be for other people.
- Furthermore, the health risks caused by excessive or late-night screen time might be better than the risks caused by not being exposed to excessive or late-night screen time. If someone needs to spend a long time on a screen for their job for instance, it may be more immediately impactful to keep their job.



Managing One's Own Screen Time

There are a variety of tools and methods that can help one manage their own screen time to combat physical health drawbacks

- Ergonomic equipment like chairs, keyboards, and mice
- Blue light blocking glasses
- <https://justgetflux.com/> and similar apps and device settings
- The 20/20/20 rule (For each 20 minutes spend 20 seconds looking at something 20 meters away)

Furthermore, we can teach students about tools and behaviors that might help them utilize screen time in healthier ways

- Make use of the block feature
- Become more cognizant of doomscrolling
- How to notice and combat addiction



A Unique Tech Problem

Screen Time having adverse effects in excess is not unique to screen time. Most things when done excessively can have adverse effects, even things that would normally be healthy like eating and exercise. However, this is a unique situation because the tools actually exist to enforce limitations on user's screen usage which can't really be done for more physical products (which is its own topic in a way). But just because something can be done doesn't mean it should. A potential problem with enforcing these medically-based decisions within the apps themselves is that there are often new medical discoveries and medical myths can wind up being surprisingly widespread. If companies are allowed to impose limitations on apps based on what they believe (or pretend to believe) are legitimate medical reasons, it could lead to even more unjustified overreach in what apps should be able to do and control.