

INTERNET ADDICTION

Internet is a necessary part of our lives. Everyone spends the majority of their day by working and/studying online, checking e-mails, and on Facebook and Twitter. Especially with the increasing use of smartphones, being online every second became a natural part of the daily routine. However, sometimes this may turn into an uncontrollable addiction. To determine whether internet has become an addiction, just like substance addiction, indicators listed below should be taken into consideration:

- Tolerance (spending more and more time online to experience the same pleasure)
- Deprivation (intense need to be online, and curiosity, irritability, anxiety when there is no access to internet)
- Emotional problems (e.g. depression, anxiety disorders)
- Disruption of daily life (decrease or suspension of social interactions)

Even though establishment of internet addiction as a psychiatric diagnosis is still in research phase, experts agree on the notion that this emotional state may affect an individual's academic/professional and social life negatively, and therefore it is an issue to be dealt with.

Since a lot of people use internet as a normal part of their work and school life, it is impossible to use the time spent on a computer, a tablet or a smartphone as a criteria to differentiate excess from normal. Here, the differentiating point should be the experience of an irresistible need to be online, and when not possible, having persistent, intrusive thoughts about being online, as well as emotional and physical complaints. Normal internet use does not impede daily life, it accompanies it and the feelings described above are not experienced.

Since university students are the group who use internet most, they also pose the highest risk for internet addiction. Internet is the medium that is easiest to access and hardest to control. Even though internet seems to provide the individual with the opportunity to be whoever they want to be, if it becomes the focus of life, it carries the risk to broaden the gap between the real and the idealized personality, and also the gap between the person and the real social environment. Noticing such tendencies and trying to understand the probable causes before becoming unable to go to school, damaging relationships, and before experiencing physical problems is the most important step to take.

Types of Internet Addiction

- Online relationships / socialization (Facebook, twitter, dating sites etc.) addiction
- Online compulsions (gambling sites, shopping sites)
- Online sex (sex chats, porn sites, etc.) addiction
- Information Overload (unstoppable surfing or database searching)
- Online game addiction

Internet provides everyone with the opportunity to learn about and share his or her interests. Using internet for the reasons listed above can sometimes be necessary and pleasing; however, when they hinder basic needs and external world, they are described as an addiction.

Suggestions to Cope with Internet Addiction

- If you have a problem, admit it. Most addicts deny their problems. Think about an alcoholic, who claims not to be an addict and he could quit if he wants to, and consider your own attitude.
- Change your routine. For example, if the first thing you do when you come home is to turn on the computer, try to break this habit by starting with a day of a week; engage yourself with something else for half an hour before turning on the computer.
- Enrich your daily life. Join clubs or other campus activities. Work out. Spend some time for activities that you can enjoy “offline” every day.
- Make a habit of not holding your phone, except to talk on the phone. Try to set yourself free of your phone while you are in class, with your friends, or busy with something else.
- Remind yourself that if you don't go online for a couple of hours, you do not miss out on important things; but if you spend too much time online, you may miss out on the external world. Everything online will remain there whenever you look up, however life will not stay still.
- Think about why internet has become such an important part of your life. How much of the things you do are necessary, how much of it is fun, and how much of it is unnecessary? Are the things you do online means to cope with sadness, emptiness and insecurities, or do they protect you from loneliness, detach you from the problems at

home? After answering these questions, if you think that internet has become a coping method for you, consider alternate means of coping.

- If your physical complaints and deteriorations in your daily life are increasing, or if you are having a hard time to find a solution, you may consider help from a professional.

Situational Addictions

Even if internet has not been very important to you beforehand, when you are in love, or going through a break up, or faced with a rejection/disappointment in social life, you may find yourself stuck to your computer or phone. You may memorize all Facebook pictures of your ex, may think that every tweet of your ex is a message to you, or may find it impossible to distract yourself from the comments your friends are posting. In such situations, internet may be a way of avoiding the intense emotions; and you may be settling for a virtual satisfaction, while your real need stays unsatisfied. Even if the upcoming experiences seem to be negative, facing them may help you feel better and act healthier in the long run.

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