

TECHNOLOGY & MENTAL HEALTH

It's a question that's brought before us often: is technology use good for our mental health? The answer to that question is it depends. Technology often gets a bad rap but can play an essential and beneficial role in our lives. Take a look at the following:

- **Online Education** provides a flexible opportunity for us to enlighten our minds, advance or change careers, or find solutions to specific problems.
- **Communication** platforms and social media allows us to connect with others across vast distances, which, in many cases, helps battle loneliness, isolation, anxiety, and depression easily.
- **Online Therapy** – Mental health counselors and therapists are embracing online therapy and telemedicine for their clients, with some even making it their primary service.
- **Mobile Apps** – There are also numerous mobile applications to help with stress and anxiety management, including popular ones like Calm that can help you do simple things like remembering to breathe, or advance meditation.
- **New Hardware** – The next Apple Watch is supposed to detect when you are having a panic or anxiety attack and warn you to calm down or seek help.

However, we all know there are negative impacts in regards to technology. Cyberbullying, physical conditions like neck strain, hearing loss, and obesity are just a few of the problems. Plus, its overuse can also lead to the number one cause of suicide... depression.

The **constant distraction** of technology prevents us from focusing and consolidating information to memory properly. It can lead to tech or internet addiction as our brains grow to expect that constant stimulation. *The average Generation Z user will unlock their smartphone up to 79 times per day. Then they will use it for 5 hours each day.*

Excessive screen time can lead to **sleep loss**. The bright lights from smartphones, computers, or tablets block melatonin, which regulates sleep.

Despite the greater ability to connect with people, interacting through technology as opposed to in-person can lead to **behavioral and social challenges** because there isn't a balance between online and face-to-face communication. These blurred boundaries of the work-life balance have also contributed to workers being more stressed, less rested, and spending more time on social media, and less time with friends and family.

So how can you minimize your risk of depression or mental health issues from your technology use?

Set a limit on your screen time or turn off your devices at a specific time every night. During the workday, take time a few minutes every hour to step away from the computer. Make time for "real life": exercise, engage in different physical activities, and balance your screen time out with face-to-face interactions. And when you are on your smartphone, find time to use the helpful apps and communication techniques to improve your life. You'll find yourself happier and healthier.



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