

Are You Addicted to Your Smartphone?



Smartphone addiction is not a recognized mental disorder, but it gets a lot of attention in the news. One in three people can't get through a meal without looking at their phones, according to one study. Signs of problematic phone use may include feeling anxious without your phone, constantly checking your phone without a reason, reaching for your phone when bored, losing track of time while using your phone, being distracted while with friends or watching TV because you are on your phone, and texting while

driving—especially after attempts to stop the practice following a near accident or close call. Compulsive behaviors are actions people engage in repeatedly even though they wish they could stop. Smartphone addiction can be one of them. Don't stay frustrated, feeling out of control. Talk with a counselor or your EAP.

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Master Your Self-Care Strategy

Self-care is not just about getting enough sleep, eating well, or taking time off for a massage. Rather, it is a conscious process of being attentive to your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, but with a goal in mind—to build resilience that allows you to be more capable of bouncing back from adversity and managing stress better. To practice this strategic form of wellness, focus your attention on: 1) physical fitness and emotional wellness (how you manage thoughts, feelings, and beliefs so you engage in positive thinking); 2) being aware of your emotions and the emotions of others with whom you interact, and use this awareness to make better decisions and communicate more effectively; 3) knowing how to create positive emotions. Does walking outside for 15 minutes improve your mood? Does taking five minutes to tidy up your office lift your spirits? When you arrive home after work, does sitting down to play the piano inspire you? Know your “go to” natural, healthy, and positive mood enhancers and use them routinely; 4) having someone with whom you can confide in and process challenges. Your EAP can be a source for this support; 5) eating right and getting enough sleep; and 6) having constructive ways of dealing with emotional stress—a hobby, spiritual practices, networking, leisure activities. Examining this list, do you see opportunities to improve upon your self-care strategy?

Moving Beyond “Just Coping”

We are all different psychologically, so an event that creates acute stress for one person may not affect another. Don't be fooled into thinking that your crisis requires toughening up or “pressing on” like you imagine others might. Stigma against asking for help can lead to needless suffering. Fact: Getting help earlier shortens the period of distress and solves problems faster, and most counseling is not long term. One or two sessions may be all it takes to resolve the problem you face.

Is Your Patience Running Thin?

Patience is a learned skill, but unlearning patience can happen in our quick-to-deliver technological world. A study from the United Kingdom found that most people demonstrate a short fuse at 25 seconds for a red light, 16 seconds for a web page to load, and 28 seconds for a cup of tea to boil. Recapturing your sense of patience starts with awareness of how impatience increases stress and how undesirable experiencing anger can be. Don't get mad at technology or lose yourself to a fast-paced, hurry-up society. Instead, practice patience by challenging yourself when the opportunity appears. From red traffic lights to checkout lines, you will have plenty of opportunities to react as usual or rebel. Choose the slower line at a drive-in, the longer line at the checkout counter, or learn how to use waiting time to complete a to-do list or another cerebral task. While waiting, notice the world around you and enjoy escaping the pressure as you take back control over the push to be impatient. Celebrate taking charge, getting your life back, and having more resilience to withstand everyday life events we all find stressful. If pressure builds, breathe in slowly, hold it a few seconds, and exhale slowly to reinforce a relaxed feeling.

Give Your Brain a Break

Be more productive at work by taking breaks. Here's your motivation if you are inclined to skip them: a neurologic discovery called "voluntary" and "involuntary" attention. Each type of attention engages different uses of your brain. When you focus on work, whether it is a computer or a car engine, you are purposeful, intense, and focused; this is voluntary attention. In contrast, involuntary attention occurs when you walk down a sidewalk; you are not focused, but you are "attending" to the environment as it appears—butterflies, clouds, traffic, trees, flowers, wind, sunshine, sounds, and sensations. This process of allowing your brain to engage the world this way (being "pulled" along rather than "pushed") is what relieves your stress and refreshes you neurologically. The payoff is improved memory and attention back at work. Learn more: Google "how nature soothes involuntarily."