



Compulsive Internet Use

With increasing access to the Internet, we have a constant stream of information and entertainment at our fingertips 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For many, it is also an integral tool for navigating daily life and a way to stay connected with friends and family. While there are many benefits to using the Internet, how much is too much?

Neglecting relationships, work, or other important things in your life due to your Internet usage are signs of a potential problem. While there isn't a definitive test or diagnosis, learning about the signs of compulsive Internet use can help you regain your balance and get on with the rest of your life:

Some signs include:

- Being secretive and lying to loved ones, friends or employers to cover up online activities
- Lower productivity and performance at school or work
- Neglecting responsibilities in order to be online
- Repeatedly using the Internet as an outlet for feelings or as a replacement for relationships
- Unsuccessful attempts to quit or limit Internet use
- Feelings of anxiety, depression or irritability when the Internet is not available or cut short
- Lost track of time while online
- Loss of interest in hobbies and other activities
- Loss of interest in friends and significant others

What you can do

If any of the signs listed above apply to you, or if you are simply looking to limit the time spent online, consider the following:

- 1. Track your time.** The first step is to find out exactly how much leisure time you are spending on the Internet, and what part of the day. You may be surprised at how much of your day is made up of frequent 15 minute blocks of online browsing. Try tracking your time for a week or two.
- 2. Set a limit.** Identify how much time each day you want to allow yourself to spend on the Internet, and when. It may help to write it down and continue to track your time.
- 3. Identify healthy activities.** When tracking your time, did you notice any triggers to your Internet use? For example, do you find yourself logging on as soon as you get home from work? Or throughout the day when you are feeling bored or lonely? If so, substitute these times in your schedule with an activity, such as going to the gym after work, meeting a friend for coffee, or going for a quick walk.
- 4. Get support.** If you can't seem to get a handle on your Internet use on your own, consider meeting with a professional therapist. While compulsive Internet use isn't a formal psychological disorder, a therapist can help identify any underlying issues that may be related with your Internet use, and can make recommendations for treatment.

For more information about compulsive Internet use, contact your Employee Assistance Program via the website or toll free number listed below.

Reference: Workplace Options. (2011). Internet addiction: Signs, symptoms, treatment, and self-help. Retrieved from <http://www.apshelplink.com>



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