



The Fairview Town Crier

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Depression, Anxiety and Our Phones

How to live with one and not the others

Recently, I have noticed a marked increase in depression and anxiety among people of all age groups, but particularly teens and young adults. My thoughts were confirmed when the World Health Organization recently published a piece stating that since COVID there has been a 25% increase in the prevalence of depression and anxiety worldwide. This prompted me to dig deeper, and I found that the connection is actually disconnection. Further, the root of the disconnection can be directly linked to our electronic devices and the time spent on them.

Undoubtedly, electronic devices have changed our worlds. As someone who grew up with only a landline and who watched the complete evolution of Apple—from the MS-DOS operating system to the smartphone—I can attest to many positives of advanced technology and the “Worldwide Web.”

Like most of us, I would be completely lost without my phone. It is a tool that I use constantly throughout the day. I use it to stay up-to-date on my work messages and emails. I also have a slew of medical resources at my fingertips, which makes my job much easier. I have apps that can track my children’s whereabouts, troubleshoot carpooling and order takeout



Nighttime scrolling interferes with sleep and increases depression.

within minutes. Best of all, I can text with my daughter while she is away at college. We talk daily and I know she is safe, how she is doing in class, what is going on with her roommates, etc. But is it the same as when she is home? No, it is not! I miss her smile, her hugs, her laugh and the funny faces she makes when she is telling a story. I could go on, but you get the point.

Humans are not meant to be isolated. And while our electronic devices help to keep us connected in many ways, when used in excess, they are extremely isolating. Studies conflict on what the magic number is, but somewhere between two and greater than six hours per day of time spent on electronic devices has been

shown to be detrimental to our emotional wellbeing and be directly linked to an increase in depression and anxiety.

There are many reasons why spending too much time on electronics causes depression and anxiety. To name a few:

Time on electronic devices is usually an individual activity, and too much alone time leads to isolation and loneliness.

Blue lights from screens interrupt our circadian rhythm, which interferes with sleep and thereby increases depression.

Much of our time on devices is dedicated to social media, which creates a venue for comparisons, where we are constantly measuring ourselves against edited, embellished or even false versions of others. These behaviors can become compulsive and lead to low self-esteem, which fuels depression and anxiety.

Each time our devices ping with a notification or our social media posts get likes, hearts or snaps, there is a release of dopamine. Over time, we require more Internet use for the same dopamine reaction, requiring more time on devices. This is a cycle that further feeds isolation.

Excessive device use reduces time spent with others and limits

interpersonal interactions. Body language is barely recognized and in-person communication skills are severely compromised, leading to a rise in social anxiety.

When we are on our devices, we are usually sedentary. Lack of exercise has several physical and psychological implications including—you guessed it—depression and anxiety.

So, what do we do? Electronic devices and the Internet are not going away, so we have to learn to live with them. We have to celebrate the good that they bring and the conveniences they offer, balanced with the knowledge of how they can be harmful.

We should make a concerted effort to limit daily usage. Adults should be role models for youth and demonstrate interactions away from screens. We should make a point to have device-free time at home, including face-to-face time together. Get outside, take in nature and exercise. Seek joy away from devices, but from within, and most importantly, with others. It won’t solve everything, but it’s a meaningful step forward.

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