Digital Well-Being

We live in a digital world. Everything we do has a digital element to it, especially in more recent years. We use digital devices at school, at work, and in our day-to-day lives, because they simply make everything easier! In fact, many of us feel as if we couldn't function without our digital devices!

Benefits of digital device use:
- Accessing information, services and support
- Helping us to express ourselves creatively
- Connecting with like-minded others
- Staying in touch with friends and family
- Celebrating milestones and special events
- Self-management (e.g. Sleep, Physical Activity, Nutrition Applications)

However, using too much digital technology can have **negative consequences**.

Negative consequences

Using computer screens too much can have an impact on our eyes, our posture, as well as our neck and shoulder area. The blue light from computer screens also has an effect on our sleeping hormone, melatonin, so using screens too much at night can lead to trouble with sleeping.

Spending too much time on digital devices and the internet can lead to higher stress or lower mood, and problems with social connectedness. It can get in the way of more healthy behaviours like spending time in nature, exercising, sleeping or spending time with others. Sometimes, people might find themselves feeling like they cannot live without their digital devices or being connected to the internet.

Social media can be overwhelming. Sometimes we can think our online presence is more important than enjoying real life. Too often we compare our 'behind the scenes' with other person's 'highlights reel'. Also, social media platforms tend to be less moderated than some other corners of the internet, meaning that people can post certain content you might find upsetting.

The 'fear of missing out' ('FOMO' for short)

Refers to feeling as if others are having more fun, experiencing better things, or living better lives than you are. It is not just feeling as if there are other things you could be doing at this moment, but it involves a sense of helplessness that you are missing out on something fundamentally important that others are experiencing right now. It can make us feel boring, or uninteresting, and can lead to lower self-esteem unless we are maintaining a solid and consistent online presence.

Aside from experiencing increased feelings of loneliness, FOMO can lead to greater involvement in unhealthy behaviours. Interestingly, FOMO acts as a trigger for increased use of social media sites like Instagram and Facebook, although it is often made worse by such increased use.

What are the warning signs of excessive device use?

You may need to make some changes to your digital device use if:

1. You feel symptoms of eye strain including eye watering, tired or aching eyes, blurred vision, double vision, dry eyes, eye redness or headaches
2. You spend more time communicating with others digitally than face-to-face
3. You feel anxious when you do not have access to your digital devices
4. Feeling overwhelmed or stressed because of information overload
5. You find yourself comparing yourself to others
6. You have difficulty sleeping or have disruptions in sleeping pattern
7. You are having fewer face-to-face conversations with your friends and family
8. You're feeling disconnected from those closest to you
9. Using the internet is preventing you from getting other things done in the offline world
10. Using the internet or social media is leading to feelings of being overwhelmed

How can I practice digital wellness?

Practicing digital wellness means prioritizing self-control. It means using digital devices with intention, in order to bring the most benefit your physical and mental health, your relationships, your learning, safety, and work-life balance.

BE CONSCIOUS

1. **Be aware of your digital habits** – How long do you spend using your digital devices? How do you spend your time on them? Keep an eye on your patterns so that you can then make the changes you need. Some smartphone applications have this feature.
2. **Be aware of what distracts you** – Have a think about what tends to distract you from your work or your life when you are online.
3. **Monitor the impact of activities on your mood** - Pay attention to how you are feeling when you engage with digital devices and online content. If some activities put your mood or energy down, spend less time on them and/or replace them with activities that help to pick you up
4. **Embrace boredom** - … Don't digitize it! Try productive alternatives to scrolling aimlessly through social media and websites for hours. Reading an article, watching a video or listening to a podcost about something you find interesting might be a useful alternative. You may also want to strike up a conversation with a friend.

BE INTENTIONAL

1. **Set time limits on your digital device use…** and keep them! Setting reminders or alarms can help
2. **Take breaks to reduce eye strain**: The 20-20-20 rule for digital viewing is handy: to reduce eye strain, after every 20 minutes of screen time, take a 20-second break to look at something at least 20 feet away
3. **Remember your posture!** – Be kind to your spine! Remember to keep a good posture
4. **Try setting an internet bed-time** – Using your phone or digital technology before sleeping can have negative impacts on your sleeping pattern too. Hit two birds with one stone by activating 'do-not-disturb' settings after certain times to ensure that you are not disturbed by anything that is not urgent. Try reading a book before bed instead
5. **Change your focus** - Take some time away from digital devices every once in a while, and remember to live your real life: read books, engage in physical activity, spend more time time outside or with your friends and family, and perhaps even try some relaxation techniques!

6. **Set and keep 'gadget free' times** when you are not using your digital devices
7. **Seek positive and accurate digital content**– Follow websites or social media accounts that make you feel good, keep you interested and share positive content. Remember that you can restrict certain types of content from popping up on your feeds
8. **Ground yourself in reality** - Remember that people's lives are much more complicated than what they show online. Remember that not all social media is real. Occasionally, scroll through your own profile and think about how you come across – does your own life look a lot better than your experience of it?
9. **Find your crowd** - Whatever your hobbies and passions are in life, you will most likely find others who enjoy doing the same thing. Being part of a positive online community can boost your mental health. Meanwhile, reduce connections with people who make you feel bad about yourself and your life. Yes, it is that easy
10. Try **deleting** one Social Media application from your phone for a while and see how it feels
11. **Manage your notifications** so that they they only distract you when you can be distracted!

Smartphone Applications

Some useful Smartphone Applications that can help you practice digital wellbeing:
- **Eyepro** – Sends you notifications to remind you to take a (short or long) break from your screen every now and then. Short breaks involve advice to blink whilst longer rests consist of visual exercises to prevent your eye muscles from getting tired.
- **Attentive** – Digital wellbeing – Helps to reduce mindless screentime by giving science-based tips to spend less time on your phone and create better digital habits.
- **Hold** – Helps you to reduce your time on your phone through competition and rewards.
- Stay Focused – Website and Application blocker that helps you to focus by placing restrictions on how much you use these features. This application also allows you to place limits on your overall phone use.
- **OFFTIME** – Allows you to set your own restrictions and also includes group functions that allow you to share 'offtime events' with other device users.
- **Forest** – A unique application that allows you to set a timer like in the above application. However, this application provides a visual animation of a growing tree. If you do use your phone during this time, the tree will wither and you will have to start over.

More information can be found on these links
- BeSmartOnline! - https://www.besmartonline.org.mt/
- Mental Health Helpline – 1579
- https://olli.chat/

HPDP

HPDP Home
Health Promotion
Infectious Diseases
Covid-19

USEFUL LINKS

Sexual Health
Ministry for Health
DHIR
DPHU
Organ Donation
Tobacco Free
ECDC
CDC
WHO

HELP

Contact

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate,

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