# Healthy Technology Habits

The use of technology, including social media, video games, texting, videos, internet browsing, and more, can be an enjoyable way to relax and spend your free time. However, when used in excess, technology use can decrease motivation and have negative impacts on academic performance, physical health, and mental health.

## Unhealthy Relationships with Technology

There are a number of signs that may indicate an unhealthy relationship with technology. Keep in mind that the technology relationships referenced in this handout relates primarily to technology as it is being used for non-academic or non-work related purposes.

- **Preoccupation.** Constantly thinking about or talking about certain internet sites, apps, or games may indicate an unhealthy focus on technology, especially if it's hard to focus on other things.
- **Withdrawal symptoms.** Those who experience negative emotions or sensations when unable to access a technology device may be feeling withdrawal symptoms. For example, this would include feeling antsy, anxious, or irritable when having to put your phone in your backpack during class.
- **Increased use.** A person experiencing an issue with technology use may notice a pattern of increased time spent using technology. For example, someone who used to spend an hour playing video games before bed, has more recently been staying up late playing for hours.
- **Loss of interest in other things.** Some people may experience a decreased interest in activities that they used to enjoy prior to increased technology use. For example, a person who used spend time talking with friends now spends their time on social media sites.
- **Using technology to manage mood.** If technology use is used to escape negative emotions or relieve a negative mood, it may indicate an unhealthy reliance.
- **Unsuccessful attempts at change.** If  attempts have been made to reduce technology use, but lasting change has been unsuccessful, it may indicate an issue.
- **Lying about or hiding use.** An unhealthy relationship with technology may be evident if there are attempts to hide or lie about technology use.
- **Negative impacts.** If technology use has jeopardized or negatively impacted one's social relationships, job, academic progress, or other significant responsibilities, an unhealthy relationship with technology may be indicated.

## Why can technology use be so addictive?

Technology can impact our brains in ways that are similar to addictive substances and many types of technology, including games, videos, and social media are specifically designed to grab and hold your attention. Technology use can feel pleasurable in that it can reduce boredom, make it possible in the short-term to ignore negative thoughts or emotions, and can sometimes make it feel easier to connect with others without having to do it face-to-face. However, like all addictive substances and behaviors, these pleasurable effects often cause many more difficult and negative long-term outcomes.



## Tips for Managing Technology Use

- **Monitor use.** A great place to start is to become more aware of your current habits. Take a day to monitor your screen time and write down how much time you spend with each type (for example, 45 minutes = social media, 1 hour = YouTube videos). At the end of the day, review your list and assess what changes you would like to see. Create a daily or weekly goal to limit your use in each area.
- **Out of sight, out of reach.** We often like things to be quick and convenient, and when they are, we often develop habits that are outside of our awareness. However, when we purposely make it harder to access the habit-forming item, it can be easier to make conscious choices. For example, you would likely be more successful breaking a chronic cookie habit, if you put the cookies away out of sight on a high shelf, versus on a plate on  your kitchen counter. Same goes for your devices. There is research to suggest that we think

more about our phones if they are in our line of vision (even sitting screen down on our desk) than if they are fully tucked away. Consider turning the sound off your phone and tucking it into your backpack during class or other important activities. Only pull out and turn on your laptop if needed. Store video game consoles in a cabinet or move them out of the room that you use for studying. Consider handing over the remote to a family member or friend for safe keeping while you work to study for an upcoming exam.

- **App trackers.** App trackers can be used to track the amount of time spent on certain apps and some allow you to set reminders to exit the app when your time limit is up.
- **Delete apps.** Removing apps or programs from your device is a good way to promote the "out of sight, out of mind" method. Since logging into social media via a webpage is less convenient than clicking an app, deleting the app can help reform your habits. Delete apps for good or take an "app vacation" by deleting certain apps when studying for important exams or during other busy times.
- **Turn off notifications.** Notifications are meant to grab our attention and time. Turn off notifications and other alerts.
- **Create "no device" rules.** Develop rules for yourself about places that you will not use devices (such as in bed, at the dinner table, etc.). Write these rules down.
- **Manage time gaming.** A few strategies can be helpful to manage gaming time. Make a list of daily goals and make sure all work is done prior to gaming. This way, gaming can be used as a reward, rather than a distraction or method of procrastination. Set a time limit for yourself with an alarm that requires you to get up from where you are seated (for example, an alarm clock across the room). Make gaming a social activity and let others know of your time limits. Get exercise and spend time outdoors.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Working to stay present in the moment can help you to develop the skills necessary to avoid excess technology use. Feeling an urge to check your phone? Take a few deep breaths, check in with each of your five senses, and notice things around you.
- **Stay present with others.** Looking at your phone or other device while someone else is talking communicates that they are not your priority. Practice staying present by putting away devices during social activities, classes, and meetings.
- **Seek professional help.** Many people who struggle with an unhealthy relationship with technology may

## Additional Resources

There are many resources available on healthy technology use and related topics. Check out the following resources available online.

- Understanding Social Media Use and Balance
  - https://jedfoundation.org/resource/understanding-social-media-use-and-balance/
- Understanding Social Media Stress
  - https://jedfoundation.org/digital-drama-social-media-stress-101/
- The 5:2 Digital Diet
  - https://www.itstimetologoff.com/5-2-digital-diet/
- GAA: Gaming Addicts Anonymous
  - https://www.gamingaddictsanonymous.org/

need to seek help in order to fully understand the issue and to create goals to help them move in a more positive direction. Counseling may be a good option.

## Seeking Help & Support

If you suspect an unhealthy relationship with technology or you struggle to manage time due to your devices, you are encouraged to reach out for support. As an Anoka Technical College student, a great place to start is with a college counselor. Counseling services are available to students at no charge. See the box title "Counseling Services" for additional details.

For self-help resources, check out the information linked in the "Additional Resources" Section.

## Counseling Services

Counseling services are available to support Anoka Technical College students. A counselor can talk with you about any concerns or difficulties you are facing, provide support, and help in developing strategies and skills to promote wellness and goal achievement. Counseling services are confidential and free. You are encouraged to reach out for support.

To learn more about counseling services, visit: https://www.anokatech.edu/student-services/counseling-services/

To schedule an appointment with a counselor, visit the weblink above or call 763-576-7860.