

# RISKY BUSINESS

# INTERNET ADDICTION

The Internet is a wild and wonderful place which has forever changed the way we live, learn, and work – but when a person can't find a balance between their time online and their time offline, it can mean problems for their mental health.

## AMERICA IS ONLINE



88.5% of Americans are Internet users.<sup>1</sup>



Yet less than 40% of the world has Internet access.<sup>2</sup>



40% of young adults (ages 18-24) use social media in the bathroom.<sup>3</sup>



An estimated 75% of Americans use a smart phone, tablet or mobile device to get online.<sup>4</sup>

## FOR SOME PEOPLE, GOING ONLINE BECOMES AN ADDICTION

There is no one definition for internet addiction; however, it is generally agreed upon that people who are addicted to the Internet have trouble fulfilling personal and professional obligations because of their online activities, and their use of the Internet causes strain on relationships with family and friends. People who are addicted to the Internet often experience negative emotions or withdrawal symptoms when their Internet access is restricted.

Internet Addiction may also be called computer addiction, compulsive Internet use, Problematic Internet Use (PIU), Internet dependence, or pathological Internet use.<sup>5</sup>

Researchers estimate

6%

of people are addicted to the Internet.<sup>6</sup>

## THERE ARE 5 TYPES OF INTERNET ADDICTION<sup>7</sup>

**Cybersexual:**  
Cybersex and Internet porn



**Net compulsions:**  
Online gambling, shopping, or stock trading.



**Cyber-relationships:**  
Social media, online dating, and other virtual communication



**Gaming:**  
Online game playing



**Information:**  
Web surfing or database searches



## WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME ADDICTED TO THE INTERNET?<sup>8</sup>

### ACCESSIBILITY

Most Americans can get online easily and almost immediately, at any time of day or night.

### CONTROL

People can go online when they want and without other people knowing, causing them to feel in control.

### EXCITEMENT

Going online gives people a sort of "high." The suspense of bidding in online auctions, gambling, or playing games can be especially thrilling.

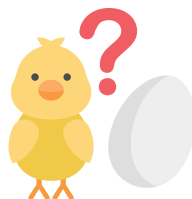
The combination of accessibility, control, and excitement make the addicted person want to continue going online.

## HOW IS INTERNET ADDICTION RELATED TO MENTAL ILLNESS?<sup>9</sup>



Adolescents who struggle with Internet addiction often have other mental health problems like alcohol and substance use, depression, suicidal ideation, ADHD, phobias, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and/or aggression.<sup>9</sup>

Adults who are addicted to the Internet are also likely to have depression, anxiety, alcohol problems, compulsive behaviors, sleep disorders, ADHD, anger issues, and/or dissociative experiences.<sup>10</sup>



There is debate about which comes first for people, Internet addiction or the co-occurring mental health problem.<sup>11</sup>

## HOW IS INTERNET ADDICTION TREATED?



Some professionals classify Internet addiction as an obsessive compulsive disorder, while others liken it to an impuls control disorder. Therefore, there is no one specific treatment for Internet addiction.<sup>12</sup>



Internet addiction treatment aims to create boundaries and balance around Internet use rather than eliminating it entirely. However, if there is a certain app, game, or site that seems to be the focus of the addiction, stopping its use may be part of treatment.<sup>13</sup>



Therapy is almost always incorporated into the treatment of Internet addiction. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and group therapy are common.



Medication may be used to manage symptoms of underlying mental illness and control intrusive thoughts about going online.



Exercise may be incorporated into Internet addiction treatment to ease the effects of reduced dopamine in the brain resulting from restricted Internet use.<sup>14</sup>

## CHECK YOURSELF

If you agree with most of the statements below, it may be time to seek help:<sup>15</sup>

- ☐ I think about being online almost constantly. If I'm not online, I'm thinking about the next time I can be or the last time that I was.
- ☐ I need to be online longer and longer each time before I feel satisfied.
- ☐ I have tried to control, reduce, or stop my Internet use, but haven't been able to do so successfully.
- ☐ I feel irritable or depressed when I try to reduce the amount of time I'm on the Internet or when I can't get online.
- ☐ The way I use the Internet has threatened a relationship with someone I care about, my job, or my school work.
- ☐ I lose track of time when I'm online.
- ☐ I sometimes lie to important people in my life about the amount of time I spend, or the types of activities I participate in on the Internet.
- ☐ Being online helps me to forget about my problems or improve my mood when I'm feeling sad, anxious, or lonely.

## TAKE CONTROL OF INTERNET USE

- ▶ Take breaks. For example, try to take a 15 minute break for every 45 minutes of Internet use.
- ▶ Fill your free time activities that are physically intense or require a lot of concentration to distract you from thinking about going online.
- ▶ Don't bring your smart phone or tablet with you when you leave the house.
- ▶ Keep track of non-essential Internet use (use that isn't related to school or work) to see if you notice patterns. Do you go online when you are bored? Are you going online to relieve feelings of loneliness or depression?
- ▶ Make a list of things of things that you enjoy doing or need to get done that don't include the Internet. If you feel tempted to go online, choose an activity from your list instead.

## IF YOU NEED HELP



Take a screen at [mhascreeing.org](http://mhascreeing.org) to determine if you are experiencing signs of an underlying mental illness. Use the results to start a conversation with your health care provider.



Seek specialized treatment. You can find treatment providers using the online SAMHSA Treatment Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov) or by calling the SAMHSA 24/7 Treatment Referral Line 1-800-662-HELP (4357).



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TAKE THE "WHAT'S TOO FAR?" QUIZ  
[mentalhealthamerica.net/whatstoofar](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/whatstoofar)

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