Health tip: Screen time and brain health

We use technology to work, learn, and facilitate our lives. Screen time refers to the amount of time spent using digital devices such as smartphones, computers, and televisions. Understanding its effects on our brain health is crucial for maintaining overall well-being. Research shows increased screen time correlates with emotional and behavioral challenges, potentially affecting both physical and mental well-being.[1]

Key facts to consider[1,2,3]

- Digital devices release "feel-good chemicals" in our brain including dopamine (reward hormone), oxytocin (love hormone), and cortisol (fight or flight hormone).
- Adults and children alike are spending significant time on screens outside of work/school.
- Too much screen time may lead to depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, hyperarousal, and other behavior problems.
- Screen usage may also lead to physical problems like obesity, eye strain, and musculoskeletal diseases.

Mental health impact

- Increased anxiety and depression risks
- Sleep disruptions
- Potential social isolation

Signs your screen time may need attention[3]

- Difficulty controlling screen time duration
- Choosing screens over other activities
- Impact on relationships or daily responsibilities
- Physical symptoms like eye strain or neck pain

Technology and relationships[4]

Technology gets a bad rap, but it may improve relationships. It enables people to meet online, stay connected and allows for remote work. It's important to find balance with technology and not overly rely on it. Stay present and put your phone away when you are with someone.

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Positive steps for healthier screen habits

1. **Practice the 20-20-20 rule** – Every 20 minutes, look at an object that is roughly 20 feet away from you for at least 20 seconds.[5]

2. **Try screen-free activities** – Reading books, outdoor activities, physical exercise, puzzles or board games and quality time with family and friends.[5]

3. **Set healthy boundaries** – Create "screen free" times and places, take regular breaks during work, use screen time tracking apps, and establish a screen free bedtime routine.[1]

Remember, technology is a tool that should enhance, not control, our lives. Small changes in screen time habits may lead to significant improvements in both physical and mental well-being.

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Sources:

1 Cleveland Clinic. https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-screen-time-can-slow-your-childs-development. 2022. Accessed June 2025

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3 Mayo Clinic. https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/are-video-games-and-screens-another-addiction. 2022. Accessed June 2025

4 Mayo Clinic. https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/featured-topic/5-ways-slimming-screen-time-is-good-for-your-health. 2024. Accessed June 2025

5 National Library of Medicine. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9434525/. 2022. Accessed June 2025