

Modern technology and mental health



How does technology affect mental health?

Some studies have shown a link between high use of social media and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Other studies have linked increased screen time (not only social media) to negative effects on mental health.

However, opinions are divided and more research is needed before we can reach a definitive answer.

Still, I find that more and more people are coming to me with symptoms related to their use of technology. I have found that there are a few common ways in which it can affect people's mental wellbeing.

Anxiety and depression



If you misread a person's feelings or take something out of context, or if someone does the same to you, it can make you feel anxious.

This happens more commonly online than face to face because text speak, Facebook posts and so on do not convey the nuances of human communication, such as tone of voice or facial gestures.

If you're thinking and worrying excessively about what you've written or who has or hasn't liked or commented on your post, this can lead to anxiety.

There is also the fact that social media can become a platform for various forms of disrespect, which can lead to low self-esteem, low confidence, anxiety and depression.

Common Anxiety vs. Depression Symptoms

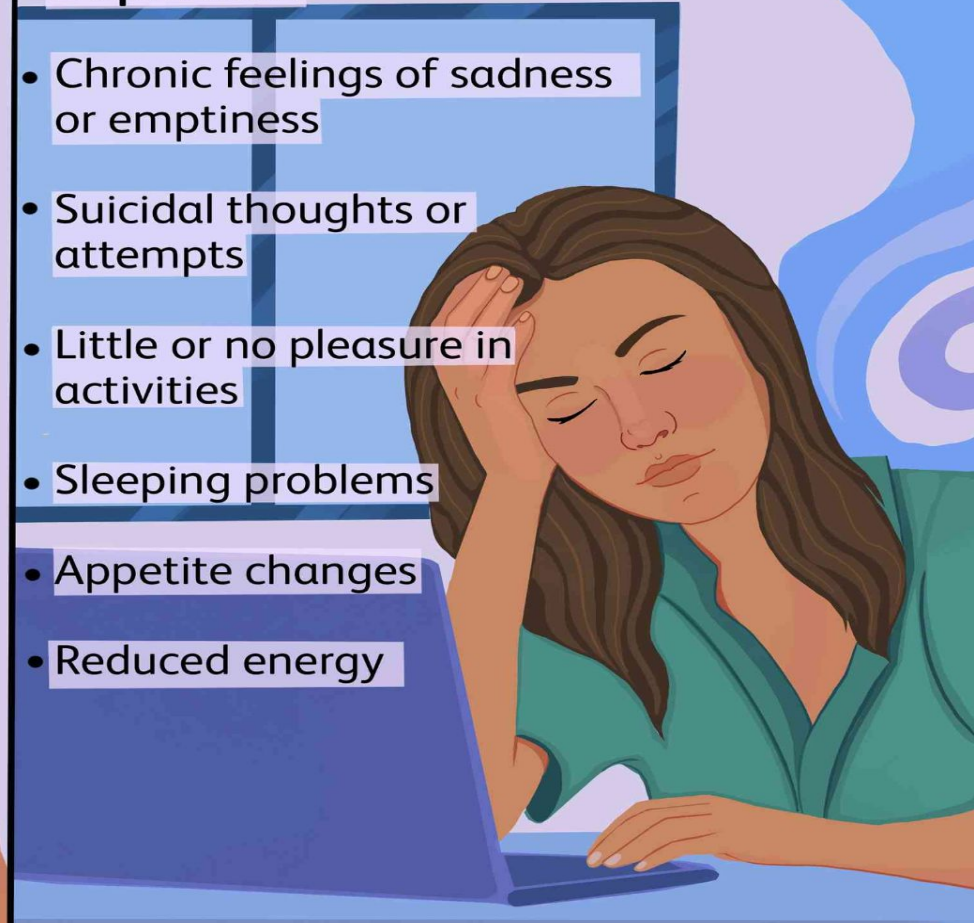
Anxiety

- Excessive feelings of fear and worry
- Dry mouth
- Tension in muscles
- Nausea
- Irregular heartbeat
- Panic attacks



Depression

- Chronic feelings of sadness or emptiness
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Little or no pleasure in activities
- Sleeping problems
- Appetite changes
- Reduced energy



Impulsivity and impatience

When we post online, for example to Facebook, it reinforces our need for instant, approving feedback

This doesn't happen in the real world, consequently we become more impatient, frustrated and anxious.



Sleep issues

In my clinic, I see many people with sleep issues where during our consultation it becomes apparent that technology has a role in their distress.

If you sleep with your phone nearby, subconsciously you are expecting a message, be it a text or Facebook notification, so your sleep will be lighter. This causes hypervigilance, which is where you are feeling alert, tense and on guard while you should be sleeping.

The light that is emitted from phones can also be problematic because it interferes with your body's natural sleep/wake cycle and suppresses the production of the sleep hormone melatonin. This convinces your body you need to stay awake for now.

Even low-level artificial light, such as from TV or computer screens, can disrupt our circadian rhythms, which can have negative effects including anxiety and depression.

These tips should help to get you started

- ❖ Go out with friends
- ❖ Spend time outdoor
- ❖ Practice some sport
- ❖ Put away the phone while you are studyng or sleeping
- ❖ Find more hobbies
- ❖ Turn off notification not to be distracted when you are busy

USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Tyler Simmonds

