

Internet addiction

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Internet addiction refers to an uncontrollable and compulsive use of the Internet which causes harms in other areas of life. When you begin to feel your Internet use is excessive, it makes you feel guilty, and detracts time from studies, family, friends and hobbies, it is a good idea to stop and think.

Frequent computer use can also result in physical, muscle-related symptoms: headaches as well as neck, back and wrist aches. Other possible symptoms include nausea and light and radiation irritation of the eyes. Such symptoms can be avoided simply by regularly getting up from the computer and taking breaks, and by taking care of ergonomics.

Many features of the Internet can be addictive: relationships with other people, Internet games, searching for information or online sex. Chat addiction and compulsive email checking are now the most typical forms of Internet addiction.

According to a net survey, more than a fourth of the respondents felt they used the Internet excessively. Dozens of cases have been reported from treatment units, in the media and in the discussion forums of the Internet. Some of them are addicts, for some the net causes less serious problems. The situation is similar to that of e.g. gambling addiction.

The threat of Internet addiction also involves a fear of new technology, much like when television became popular. The Internet is such a new thing that society does not yet have internalized norms that people could compare themselves to. Most Internet and computer use is useful for studies, relationships or work. You can have fun online, find new friends or even someone to date. The fact that someone spends a lot of time online does not mean they have no life outside of the net. But even though alcohol, too, provides plenty of enjoyment for the majority of people, a part of the population feels it is a problem rather than a source of relaxation and enjoyment.

The aim of the treatment of Internet addiction is not to put an end to it, but to limit the use to a reasonable amount of time. All addictions have the same basic features and this is why similar methods can be used in preventing and treating them. Internet addiction is very similar to gambling addiction for which methods of treatment have been developed in Finland; these methods, in turn, are based on the treatment of intoxicant addicts. Therefore an Internet addict should seek help from the professionals at youth centres or A-Clinics or The various addictions do also have their special features, and therefore treatments should be developed within the field of intoxicant prevention and treatment to take into account the special characteristics of Internet addiction.

In the United States, there are some self help services based on principles similar to those of the AA. In Finland the A-Clinic Foundation offers a self assessment test in Päihdelinkki, and also versions of the test for parents and spouses of Internet addicts, an Internet chat group, an anonymous consulting service in the net as well as the self-help tools Internet use diary and Internet use contract. You can use these services to assess your own situation and, if needed, to initiate the change.

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