

# Internet addiction

[Health & Medicine](#), [Addiction](#)



There have been numerous definitions for Internet addiction during the past decade. Widyanto and Griffiths (2006) present the most general definition of this construct as being a subset of a technological addiction, which is defined as a non-chemical or behavioral addiction that involves human-machine interaction. These addictions can either be passive, such as viewing television, or active, such as playing computer games. It should be noted that there are many terms used to describe excessive Internet use: problematic Internet use, pathological Internet use, excessive Internet use, compulsive Internet, computer addiction, Internetomania (Shapira et al., 2003; Widyanto and Griffiths, 2006). The internet was created in the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, during The Cold War. Today the internet is known as a large access network of other interconnected computer network. The internet provides a plethora of information as well as many services that people is messaging, file sharing, social networking, gaming, etc. The internet is so " convenient" that many people could not even imagine life without it. There is so much information on the internet that it basically caters to anyone with access to it. Being so accessible, the internet can easily become addictive to people just as drug can. The dictionary defines addiction as the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming. ( [www. oppapers. com](http://www.oppapers.com)) According to the presentation made by Dr. Mazumder, the term " Internet Addictive Disorder, " (IAD) was coined by a New York psychiatrist, Ivan Goldberg in 1996. And the term Pathological Internet Use (PIU) was assigned in 1996, by Kimberly Young, PsyD, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford in

Pennsylvania. Young defined Internet addiction as “ an impulse control disorder which does not involve an intoxicant”. Davis (2001) distinguishes two types of pathological Internet use, as to their utility. Specific Pathological Internet Use (SPIU) is described as using the Internet to heighten the intensity of a pre-existing addiction and refers to those dependent on content specific functions of the Internet (e. g. online stock trading, auctions, and sexual material) while Generalized Pathological Internet Use (GPIU) is used to describe general, multi-dimensional use without a clear objective (e. g. wasting time, surfing, chatting, e-mailing) Results of studies that have reported the amount of time spent online in samples of individuals who describe themselves as Internet addicts have varied greatly from 8. 5 hours per week to 21. 2 hours per week (Yang & Tung, 2007). In the paper “ Exploring Internet Addiction: demographic characteristics and stereotypes of heavy Internet users”, Soule and Kleen organized Internet addiction into five types (Soule and Kleen, 2003): 1. Cybersexual Addiction: compulsive use of adult websites for cybersex and cyberporn. Individuals who suffer from Cybersex/Internet pornography addiction are typically engaged in viewing, downloading, and trading online pornography or involved in adult fantasy role-play chat rooms. 2. Cyber-relationship Addiction: over-involvement in online relationships. Individuals who suffer from an addiction to chat rooms, IM, or social networking sites become over-involved in online relationships or may engage in virtual adultery. Online friends quickly become more important to the individual often at the expense of real life relationships with family and friends. In many instances, this will lead to marital discord and family instability. 3. Net Compulsions: obsessive online gambling, shopping,

or day-trading. Addictions to online gaming, online gambling, and eBay are fast becoming new mental problems in the post-Internet Era. With the instant access to virtual casinos, interactive games, and eBay, addicts loose excessive amounts of money and even disrupt other job-related duties or significant relationships.

4. Information Overload: compulsive web surfing or database searches. The wealth of data available on the World Wide Web has created a new type of compulsive behavior regarding excessive web surfing and database searches. Individuals will spend greater amounts of time searching and collecting data from the web and organizing information. Obsessive compulsive tendencies and reduced work productivity are typically associated with this behavior.

5. Computer Addiction: obsessive computer game playing. On-line games such as warcraft, battle realms, DOTA, etc. The interactive activities that have been most commonly cited by researchers as demonstrating a greater potential for addiction are those involving multiuser domains, chatrooms, social networking sites, bulletin boards, online games, cybersex, and gambling. Research has frequently cited the type of activity pursued online as being related to the likelihood of developing Internet addiction (Li & Chung, 2006). Internet addiction is similar to alcohol addiction that dependent users habitually expose themselves to the substance. Studies have identified the following symptoms:

- \* Preoccupation with the Internet: User often thinks about the Internet while he or she is offline.
- \* Loss of control: Addicted users feel unable or unwilling to get up from the computer and walk away. They sit down to check e-mail or look up a bit of information, and end up staying online for hours.
- \* Inexplicable sadness or moodiness when not online: Dependency on any

substance often causes mood-altering side effects when the addicted user is separated from the substance on which he or she depends. \* Distraction

(Using the Internet as an anti-depressant): One common symptom of many Internet addicts is the compulsion to cheer one's self up by surfing the Web.

\* Dishonesty in regard to Internet use: Addicts may end up lying to employers or family members about the amount of time they spend online, or find other ways to conceal the depth of their involvement with the

Internet. \* Loss of boundaries or inhibitions: While this often pertains to romantic or sexual boundaries, such as sharing sexual fantasies online or participating in cyber sex, inhibitions can also be financial or social. Online gambling sites can cause addicts to blow more money than they would in a real-life casino because users never actually see their money won or lost, so it is easier to believe the money is not real. Chat rooms can incite users to reveal secrets they would not reveal in face-to-face or phone conversations because of the same separation from reality. Also, addicted users are much more likely to commit crimes while online (e. g., 'hacking') than non-addicts.

\* Creation of virtual intimate relationships with other Internet users: Web-based relationships often cause those involved to spend excessive amounts of time online, attempting to make connections and date around the Net.

Other associated difficulties \* Anxiety. Teenagers use the Internet to distract themselves from their worries and fears. An anxiety disorder like obsessive-compulsive disorder may also contribute to excessive email checking and compulsive Internet use. \* Depression. The Internet can be an escape from feelings of depression, but too much time online can make things worse.

Internet addiction further contributes to isolation and loneliness. \* Related

with other addictions. Many teenagers suffer from other addictions, mainly to drugs, alcohol, gambling, and prenatal sex. \* Lack of social support. Internet addicts often use chat rooms, instant messaging, or online gaming as a safe way of establishing new relationships and more confidently relating to others. \* Less mobile or socially active than before. For example, teenagers may be coping with a new disability that limits their ability to drive it will be hard for them to leave the house or connect with old friends. \* Loss of a significant relationship due to Internet use: When users spend too much time on the Web, they often neglect their personal relationships. Over time, such relationships may fail as partners simply refuse to be treated badly and break off from relations with the addicted individual. What makes the Internet so addictive? Since the aspects of the Internet where people are spending the greatest amount of time online have to do with social interactions, it would appear that socialization is what makes the Internet so "addicting." Whether it's via e-mail, a discussion forum, chat, or a game online (such as a MUD), people are spending this time exchanging information, support, and chit-chat with other people like themselves.

Positive effects of Internet addiction According to the article posted at [www.livestrong.com](http://www.livestrong.com) entitled, "The positive effects of Internet addiction", referring to the positive effects of an addiction seems to be a contradiction. Addictions are generally harmful, damaging a person's relationships, work, education and health. Addiction to the Internet can do the same sort of damage, leading you to neglect family friends and obligations such as work and school. However, the internet has many benefits and has become a part of everyday life, used for news, information, research, communication and

relationships. Several benefits have been cited at Livestrong website: 1) Expanded Knowledge Base: the internet enables you to access information sources from around the world, giving you the ability to conduct research and business transactions. Internet users can access international libraries, museums and schools for a wide range of information. Schools have built Internet use in the curriculum, to improve their students' vocabulary and study habits and to help the students feel they are part of the wider world. According to the authors of "Internet Applications of Type II Uses of Technology in Education", Internet use in schools empowers students to use technology to create their own learning environments filled with enthusiasm and self-motivation. 2) Email, blogs, discussion forums and chat rooms give Internet users the ability to communicate with family and friends faster and more easily than any time in previous history. The ease of sharing photos with others, the convenience of email, even the use of the Internet to make phone calls is all benefits of the Internet. 3) Relationship: while Internet addiction can harm personal relationships if Internet use takes the place of doing things with your family and friends, the Internet can also make relationships stronger because of the ability to communicate easily. Another amazing aspect of the Internet is the possibility of creating new friendships with people around the world that you can meet through chat rooms, social networking sites and discussion forums. You can find a group that shares your interests, whether you are interested in literature, travel, cooking, religion, health problems or anything else. It is said on an article that computer nowadays has become an important household item. There are tools like spelling grammar checker, thesaurus and dictionary installed in the

computer that will be helpful for students in doing their assignments and researches. (www. oppapers. com) The Pew Charitable Trusts report that 45% of Internet users say online resources helped them to make difficult decisions or deal with major life episodes. (Society and the Internet, 2006). Two studies have reported that people coping with changes in self-concept have been aided by information and social support available on the Internet. Even though it can be argued that Internet has created a false sense of communication that often leads to complete miscommunication, it has actually opened new doors, allowing people to interact in ways that were once nonexistent. If a conversation takes place that is not face-to-face, or even with voices, it often isn't considered as true conversation. On the contrary though, a "distant" communication can often be more truthful and personal than a conversation that takes place between two people in person. According to Tannen (1998), "the big advantage to e-mail is that you can do it at your time and place; there is never the feeling that the phone is ringing and interrupting whatever it is you are doing." Writing e-mail is like writing journal; you're alone with your thoughts and your word, safe from the intrusive presence of another person. Thomas Gale, author of the Gale Encyclopedia of Childhood and Adolescence states that he, among other educators, believes in numerous benefits of Internet in education. These benefits include the familiarity created with technology, visual and audio stimulation, and the way Internet play on how most students learn from experiencing knowledge versus reading and trying to memorize the knowledge. Interventions Perhaps as a result of the attention given to the problem of Internet addiction worldwide, there has also been an increased



interest in finding effective treatments for Internet addiction. As a result of a China National Children's Center report that claimed 13% of Internet users under 18 are addicted to the Internet, the Chinese national government initiated several initiatives such as enforcing a ban on new Internet cafes. Net owners have also been required to install anti-addiction software and are asked to be extra vigilant in obtaining information on users. In addition, the government started funding "Internet boot camps" that provide a mixture of counseling, drugs and military-style discipline to Internet-addicted individuals (Aiyar, 2007). Sarah Kershaw wrote for the New York Times in 2005: "It was Professor Kiesler who called Internet addiction a fad illness. In her view, she said, television addiction is worse. She added that she was completing a study of heavy internet users, which showed that majority had sharply reduced their time on the computer over the course of a year, indicating that even problematic use was self-corrective. Can Internet addiction really be eliminated? This section describes the various treatment techniques that have been proposed as well as those that have been empirically tested.

**Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy** Many researchers have looked to Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to deal with Internet addiction (Wieland, 2005; Orzack et al., 2006; Chou, Condon, & Belland, 2005). This method assists individuals to identify and modify the thoughts and feelings that feed their addiction (Wieland, 2005; Orzack et al., 2006). A study by Orzack, Voluse, Wolf, & Hennen (2006) used cognitive-behavioral group therapy to treat a group of men involved in problematic Internet-enabled sexual behavior. The method consists of moving an individual through six stages of change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, determination, action,

maintenance, and relapse. The therapy also helps clients develop problem solving techniques to change their current situation (Orzack et al. 2006). After 16 sessions, the men in the group were shown to have an increased quality of life and decreased levels of depressive symptoms (Orzack et al. 2006). The level of problematic Internet use, however, failed to decrease significantly, though the authors of the study believe that this is because of the faulty manner in which problematic Internet use was measured (Orzack et al. 2006). Young also utilized cognitive behavioral therapy with 114 clients suffering from internet addiction (2007). The longitudinal study tracked participants through 12 sessions and did a 6-month follow up assessment. Results showed participants were better able to manage their presenting problems by the 8th session and symptom management was sustained 6 months following treatment. Reality Therapy Group Counseling Kim (2007) suggested Reality Therapy Group Counseling as a way of treating Internet addiction. Reality Therapy is based on Choice Theory, which views individuals as completely responsible for their own lives. Reality Therapy is supposed to encourage individuals to choose to improve their lives by committing to changing their Internet-related behavior (Kim, 2007). The treatment includes sessions that help clients understand that addiction is a choice, aids with the learning of proper time management skills, and introduces alternative activities to the problematic behavior.

Psychopharmacology It has been suggested that clinicians use psychopharmacology to treat Internet addiction. Selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) have been specifically suggested because of the similarity between the symptoms of Internet addiction and some obsessive-

compulsive spectrum disorders for which SSRIs have been found to be effective (Wieland, 2005). Multi-modal Approaches Young (1999), on the other hand, suggests a multi-dimensional approach to addressing Internet addiction. She suggests eight different techniques that therapists can use to help their clients: 1) Practice the opposite: consists of discovering clients' patterns of Internet use and disrupting these patterns by suggesting new schedules. 2) External stoppers: are real events or activities that a client uses to prompt himself or herself to log off of the Internet. 3) Setting goals: refers to the counselor helping the client come up with specific, achievable goals for himself or herself with regard to the amount of time spent online 4) Abstinence from certain applications: should only be encouraged with regard to specific applications that the client is unable to control. 5) Reminder cards: are visible cues that remind the client of the costs of his or her Internet addiction and the benefits of breaking the addiction. 6) Personal inventory: is another tool that helps the client recognize the benefits of breaking his or her habit by showing him or her all the activities that he or she used to engage in or can't find the time for because of the Internet addiction. 7) Support groups: Clinicians are also advised to help their clients find social support groups because many Internet addicts are said to use the Internet to compensate for a lack of social support. 8) Family therapy: used to address relational problems in the family that may have contributed to or resulted from the Internet addiction. Preventing Internet Addiction Given that certain family characteristics appear to be related to the development of Internet addiction in adolescents, (Yen et al., 2007; Wieland, 2005; Hur, 2006) some psychologists suggest that the family is of particular importance

when considering prevention strategies. Some researchers recommend a family-based prevention approach patterned after the family-based approach used to intervene for those at risk of substance abuse (Yen et al., 2007). Such an approach would include training parents to improve their ability to communicate with their children, promoting healthy family interactions, teaching parents effective family monitoring skills, and aiding the family in reducing maladaptive family functions (Yen et al., 2007).