

Compulsive Surfing

Written by Dr. Kimberly Young

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Internet Addiction is an impulsive-control problem and four subtypes have been defined:

1. **Cybersexual Addiction** – 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-Affair/Relational Addiction** – 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** – 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 lose excessive amounts of money and even disrupt other job-related duties or significant relationships.
4. **Information Overload** – 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.

Based upon the DSM, Dr. Kimberly Young developed eight criteria to diagnose Internet addiction:

1. Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet (think about previous online activity or anticipate next online session)?
2. Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?
3. Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use?

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4. Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?

5. Do you stay on-line longer than originally intended?

6. Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the Internet?

7. Have you lied to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet?

8. Do you use the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)?

Answering "yes" to five or more questions may mean you suffer from Internet addiction over a six month period and when not better accounted for by a manic episode. Internet addiction is a global problem. According to studies at the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery:

- 71% of office workers abuse the Internet during work hours visiting social networking sites, shopping online, reading personal email, or visiting pornography, gaming, or gambling sites.

- Individuals who suffer from depression, anxiety-disorders, social phobia, and other compulsive disorders are more likely to develop Internet addiction.

- Cybersex addiction, online affairs, and online gaming are the most common forms of Internet addiction.

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most effective form of treatment for Internet addiction.

- Internet predators are twice as likely to suffer from Internet addiction.

- Children who suffer from Internet addiction are more likely to suffer from depression,

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experience academic and social problems at school, and are at greater risk to develop physical illnesses, obesity, and carpal tunnel syndrome.

According to the Stanford University School of Medicine Study, 1 out of 8 Americans suffer from Internet Addiction, 14% of respondents found it hard to abstain from Internet use for several days; 5.9% said excessive Internet use affected their relationships; 8.2% said the Internet was a means of escape from the real world.

According to the Chinese Government, approximately 13 % of Chinese teenagers suffer from Internet addiction and they have banned the opening of Internet cafes for the year 2007.

The Government of China funded a military-style boot camp to combat the disease. Patients are males between 14 and 19 years old. This China boot camp reports a 70% recovery rate and over 1,500 young who have received treatment at this facility operating since 2004.

In Germany, estimates suggest that close to 1 million people are addicted to the Internet, or about 3 percent of the German online population. In 2003, the German social security services instituted the first camp in the seaside town of Boltenhagen, northern Germany. It is the first camp of its kind in Europe and aims to wean children off computers.

In Amsterdam, the first Detoxification Center to treat video game addiction opened in 2006.

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Mumbai adopted a measure to cut the students' use of Internet in the school dormitories after the suicide of an IIT student in October of 2005 due to Internet abuse.

In the US, the first inpatient residential center specializing for Internet addiction recovery opened in 2009.