

ARE YOU HOOKED ON GADGETS?

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, NCC, CEAP, SAP

A popular morning show recently discussed a New York Times article about being “hooked on gadgets.” The reporters discussed “unplugging their blackberries and recharging their brains.” It’s ironic that a 24-hr. news channel – a major culprit in the “overstimulation of America” – addresses the danger of too much stimulation! We are a society of “NOW.” We want what we want when we want it! We expect to be able to multitask in ways that were unimaginable twenty years ago.

The constant influx of technology and information bombards us: cable TV, 24 hours of current events, cell phones, text messaging, twitter, facebook, video games, emails, and the list goes on.

Remember watching TV as a family - when TV dinners were a treat and we ate them on TV trays - together? This was a far cry from traditional family meals before television, but at least we were together – centered around the family’s only TV. Today, we are isolated – family members each watch their own TVs or become entranced with video games, texting, email, etc. (I recently heard of a teenager texting her mom from her bedroom rather than walking down a flight of steps to talk in person.)

What IS this doing to our brains? Our families? Our social life? Have we become addicted to the technology that was invented to make our lives easier? Is this technology actually short circuiting our brains and our relationships?

All this stimulation is exciting, and fun. It’s also disruptive, time-consuming, and stressful. It undermines our ability to focus and affects our short term memory - not to mention that it makes us RUDE! How many conversations are interrupted by someone answering a cell phone? Have you gotten upset with someone because they were “too busy” at work to answer your call or text? Are you guilty of emailing or texting terse messages instead of discussing things in detail or writing a letter or thank you note? Much of the “graciousness” in communication has been lost.

Addiction is defined as being abnormally tolerant of something that is physically or psychologically habit forming. Pay attention to the time and attention you spend with your technological “toys.” Try turning off the computer or cell phone and spending quality time with your loved ones. Set aside specific times to use your technology. How do you feel? Nervous? Anxious? Out of control? Let these feelings motivate you to simplify your life.

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