



## Computers and the Internet: Too Much of a Good Thing?

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Depending upon one's frame of reference, computer technology can be a blessing or a curse.

As tools, the computer and the World Wide Web have undoubtedly opened the door to more efficient research and streamlined the dissemination of crucial information and knowledge while providing a host of enjoyable entertainment opportunities. However, as with many new developments, there is a downside.

What parent has not worried about a child's safety while exploring in cyberspace? How many spouses or partners have fretted over a significant other's obsessive fixation to a computer screen? How much turmoil has resulted from Internet romances gone awry, from problem online gambling and shopping, or from the havoc brought about by compulsive viewing of pornography?

While disagreement exists among professionals about applying the term "addiction" to excessive computer use, it is true many people, both young and old, have experienced serious bouts of excessive computer and Internet preoccupation. Too late, many users discover they have crossed the line which separates safe, healthy computer use from destructive, problematic involvement. This will come as no surprise to parents alarmed by a child's hour-after-hour, solitary immersion in video games to the detriment of homework, exercise, family involvement and recreation.

It is impossible here to delineate normal from abnormal computer and Internet use. What follows are some questions an individual might ask to assess his or her use:

1. Do I chronically use the computer to escape problems of everyday living or "zone out from" unpleasant feelings?
2. Has my computer use resulted in loss of sleep, fatigue, or lackluster performance at work or school?
3. Have I withdrawn from social and intimate relationships with *real* people in favor of "hiding out" in the anonymity of the cyber world?
4. Have I allowed my children too much unmonitored and uncensored exposure to the Internet which could be harmful or dangerous to them?
5. Has my computer or Internet use caused strife with my spouse or significant other?
6. Have I betrayed a committed relationship by conducting a "second life" where internet chatting turned into an emotional or physical affair?
7. Are people dear and close to me complaining that excessive use has compromised my childrearing, household responsibilities or work obligations?
8. Am I ashamed of my online behavior? Do I hide or lie about it?

If in answering these questions I find myself feeling uncomfortable or if I would hesitate to share my answers with friends and loved ones, perhaps I need to confide in a trusted person or counselor about the extent of my computer and online activities. At the very least, I may want to investigate my behavior further by exploring a useful resource like The Internet Addiction Support Group ([www.netaddiction.com](http://www.netaddiction.com), click on "Resource Center"). Perhaps I need to consider ramping up protection of my children from cyber dangers by

investigating resources like the Net Nanny ([www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com)). Finally, I can strive for accountability for my actions by being honest with myself and open with others about my computer and Internet use.

Like eating, shopping or working, there is nothing inherently wrong with using the computer or Internet. Trouble comes with *too much* use. Few tools equal the power of the computer to enhance communication, explore new ideas or promote creativity. These are *good things*. The question is one of moderation: is my use of the Internet too much of a good thing?

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