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Screen Time and Mental Health:
Why Cutting Back Matters for Your Employers

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Screens have become an integral part of our personal and professional lives. From smartphones to computers to TVs, we are constantly surrounded by digital devices. It's important to understand how excessive screen time affects mental health and find ways to cut back. Excessive screen time both at the workplace and at home could affect one's job performance. Prolonged screen time can lead to various mental health challenges and worsen existing diagnoses, such as: depression, anxiety and post-traumatic-stress-disorder. So, I recommend employers encourage their employees to consider a "digital detox" to improve their well-being.

When people are looking at screens, they sometimes feel like they lose track of time. They don't do things that they want to be doing otherwise and don't feel well after. They can feel like they've lost control. Comparing our "blooper reels" to the "highlight reels" of others on social media could lead to anxiety, depression, information overload, sleep disturbances and low self-esteem. While the internet has many benefits, using it without intention or purpose can be a sign of concern.

Asking oneself, "Am I spending too much time online or watching TV?" is a healthy start and can help employees examine their own behavior.

There are certain signs or questions that can help you determine if you could benefit from turning off screens periodically. To assess if your time online could be negatively affecting your well-being, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I spending more time online or watching TV than I intended?
- Am I sacrificing important real-world activities for time online or watching TV?
- Do I feel anxious, restless, nervous or irritable when stepping away from screens?
- Am I engaging in screen time at inappropriate times, like at work or during time with family or friends?

To boil it down, are people doing things unintentionally and feeling like they're losing control, or are people going into their screen time with a specific intention in mind?"

What Are the Benefits of Reduced Screen Time?
Reducing screen time has numerous benefits for your mental health and overall well-being. Some of the main advantages include:

- Improved sleep
- Enhanced focus
- More real-life interactions
- Boosted mental health

How Can I Limit Screen Time?
Limiting screen time is about more than just cutting down on hours spent online or watching TV. It's about making intentional choices to enhance your quality of life.

Regain control of your digital habits to promote balance and self-control by:

- Limiting screen time to set hours of the day
- Designating device-free zones
- Establishing a daily routine
- Using app settings on your smartphone to monitor usage
- Participating in screen-free activities, like reading, exercise and face-to-face interactions
- Separating work and personal screen time

Our attention is a very finite resource, and we can use behavioral clues that are individualized to tell whether we're having a particular problem with digital media or devices. Encouraging employees to engage in a self-assessment and schedule time for things that we know science shows help our mental and physical health, like exercise and spending time outdoors. I think that will help support a 'digital detox plan.

About the Author and Hackensack Meridian Health: Dr. Justin Kei is a clinical psychiatrist and medical director for The Debra Simon Center for Integrative Behavioral Health and Wellness, affiliated with Hackensack Meridian Health. He is board certified in psychiatry, addiction medicine, and lifestyle medicine. His interests include leveraging positive psychology and mindfulness in harmony with modern medical therapeutics to produce holistic wellness and recovery from mental health conditions. Hackensack Meridian Health is a not-for-profit health care organization, an integrated health care network providing services throughout New Jersey, offering a complete range of medical services, innovative research and life-enhancing care.

Here is the link for the original article for which this update was written and revised by Dr. Kei.

https://www.hackensackmeridianhealth.org/en/healthu/2024/11/12/screen-time-and-mental-health-why-cutting-back-matters?utm_source=HealthU&utm_campaign=1ff3286500-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_HEALTHU_NEWSLETTER_11_13_2024&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_80815bebc5-2327395b1c-66634380