ADDICTED TO THE INTERNET

The Internet has changed our world. It can enrich our lives by providing entertainment, information, social networking, gaming, and connections to people all over the world. However, for some, Internet use can grow into a problem. People may find themselves online-shopping, gaming, social networking, site surfing, blogging, stock trading, gambling, having cybersex, viewing pornography-to an extent that it interferes with their ability to keep up with school, relationships, and work, and/or has a negative effect on their mood. College students in particular may develop overuse of the Internet. Increased accessibility, a culture that supports computer and Internet use, and lots of unstructured time can lead to problematic Internet use in some students.

Consequences of Internet Addiction

- Fatigue and sleep difficulties
- Withdrawal from other forms of social activities such as hanging out with friends, or participating in study groups, physical activity, and/or campus organizations
- Declining grades
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (pain, numbness, and burning in your hands that can radiate up the wrists, elbows, and shoulders)
- Dry eyes or strained vision
- Back aches and neck aches
- Headaches

You May Have a Problem If You:

- You have mixed feelings of well-being and guilt while at the computer.
- You make unsuccessful efforts to quit or limit your computer use.
- Frequently spend longer than you intend or lose track of time when you are on the Internet
- Cover up how much time you are spending online
- Frequently justifying and rationalizing your internet use
- When you are not on the computer, you think about it frequently and anticipate when you will use it again.
- You use the computer repeatedly as an outlet when sad, upset, or for sexual gratification.
- Lose sleep because you are using or thinking about using the Internet
- Feel anxious, depressed, or irritable when your computer time is shortened or interrupted
- Use the Internet to escape or not think about other problems in your life
- Suffer in your academic or job performance because of your Internet use
- Experience physical problems due to your use of the Internet
- Hear concerns from others about your Internet use
- Neglect other responsibilities to be online
- Spend time engaged in illegal activities on the Internet

How Can I Help Myself?

- **Set Specific Goals For Going Online**
  - o Example- If you need to do web research for class, set the goal of going directly to the academic site so that you can accomplish your research first.

- **Increase Your Awareness About Your Time Online**
  - o Create a log of how much time you are spending on gaming, email, social networking, newsgroups, the Web, and other Internet applications.
  - o Schedule your time online like you would for other daily activities.
  - o Decide how long you plan to be online each session and set a timer.
  - o Computer software products are also available to help limit internet sessions.

- **Limit Access To The Internet**
  - o Study in a place without access to the Internet
  - o Turn off automatic alerts (i.e., that you've received a new message or that new posts have been made to a favorite site or newsgroup), as these can pull your attention away from what you are doing.
  - o Set your home page to something academic instead of a site that distracts you.

- **Check Out Your Thoughts And Beliefs About The Internet**
  - o What are your thoughts and beliefs about the importance of the Internet?
  - o Do you rationalize your use by saying, "I have to check my email, I may have a new message."
  - o Do you really need to check your email again, especially if checking your email might lead you away from focusing on the material for a test the next day?

- **Evaluate Your Triggers** (Times or situations when you're prone to internet overuse).
  - o Is it when you are feeling bored, lonely, depressed, or anxious?
  - o Consider what the Internet might be replacing in your life.
  - o Are you using the Internet to escape something in your world?

- **Consider Alternatives**
  - o Hang out with or call friends
  - o Engage in physical activity
  - o Join a student organization
  - o Enjoy a hobby

Books (Available for browsing in the UI Counseling & Testing Center Self-Help Room)

- Caught In The Net: How To Recognize The Signs Of Internet Addiction - And A Winning Strategy For Recovery. Kimberly S. Young, 1998.

- In The Shadows Of The Net: Breaking Free From Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior. Patrick Carnes, David Delmonico, & Elizabeth Griffin, 2001.

Need Additional Help?