

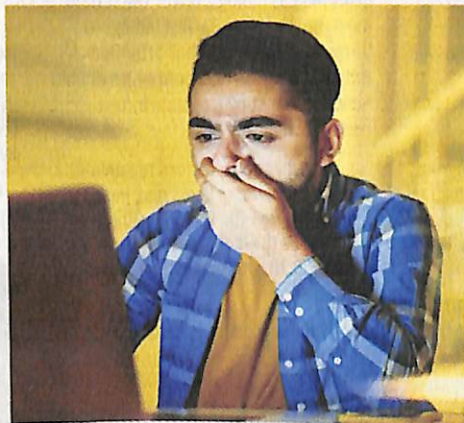
Too much screen time adversely affects cognition

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DEMENTIA, an umbrella term for loss of brain functions that affect memory and other thinking abilities, is often associated with ageing. However, it is no longer specific to the elderly now, as with increasing consumption of digital content, youngsters are also struggling with the new condition — digital dementia.

“Usually, people experience dementia after 65. However, those who use digital devices more may experience symptoms of dementia even before that. It negatively impacts daily life, work and communication. The excessive use of digital devices has been affecting the functioning of the brain; as a result, several youngsters are experiencing memory loss and difficulty concentrating, reduced attention span, etc,” said Dr Arun B Nair, professor of psychiatry at Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram.

“If a person is mentally tired but hasn't done much, the brain might be overloaded — not with work, but with constant stimulation. If symptoms start interfering with daily life — whether in school, work, or relationships — it's worth consulting a professional. Catching it early can prevent long-term impact and restore cognitive strength,” said Dr Neeraj H, consultant psychiatrist at Apollo Adlux Hospital, Angamaly. “Studies show that people who use digital devices for more than three hours may experience some issues in their brains. When we watch cartoons, online games or action movies, the brain may adjust to the high speed of movements, making it difficult to adjust to slow videos, reading and other activities. It leads to memory loss,” said Dr Arun, adding that people above 40 years also experience such



issues affecting their efficiency.

According to the Flynn Effect, the intelligence quotient scores rise over time and are better than previous generations. However, according to Dr Arun, the reverse of the Flynn Effect is being seen more. “The IQ of younger generations is decreasing. The brain may not function properly when we use media for a long time. We are not remembering phone numbers as they are stored on mobile phones. Thus, the capability of the brain to remember phone numbers gradually decreases. Topographical memory, the ability to find a place, is also decreasing as we have online maps. Thus these parts of our brain are not functioning properly as before,” he said.

Symptoms to watch out for

- Lack of concentration
- Forgetfulness ● Loss of focus

Reduced problem-solving ability

“During the pandemic, digital screens kept

us connected and functioning. But for children and young adults, the prolonged exposure to online classes, games, and social media blurred the boundaries between learning, leisure, and overstimulation. This shift disrupted natural development patterns, particularly in attention and emotional regulation. A growing brain needs movement, boredom, imagination — and most of all, real human connection. While not all screen use is harmful, the pandemic-accelerated habits may have long-term consequences for young minds,” added Dr Neeraj.

Break the cycle

- **Digital detoxification** — Avoid using digital devices for one or two months and try to remember numbers, processes, locations, etc.
- **Sunlight and exercise** — Help in dopamine secretion, which improves concentration. Endorphins help keep humans happy. More blood circulation, vitamin D, etc.
- **Eight-hour sleep** — It helps in the consolidation of memory. It helps in processing what we learnt and did in the daytime.
- **Develop more human connections and networks**
- **Keep the body hydrated and follow a healthy diet**
- **When we restart using digital devices, limit its use**

The brain is flexible. It can recover.
Start with a digital pause: regular, short breaks from devices during the day. Create “screen-free zones” at home, like the bedroom or dining table.

Engaging more in real-world activities — reading, walking, gardening, playing with your kids — can help retrain your attention and memory systems. Digital balance isn't about giving up technology — it's about giving the brain a chance to breathe,” said Dr Neeraj.

XPLAINER