

Internet Fatigue

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It's no secret that the Internet is a draining place. The ever-expanding features of social media, the anonymity of online forums, and the instant and seemingly unlimited access into the lives of those around us have been steadily losing their luster among Internet users, as more people are disconnecting from what they deem an over-connected world. It's called "Internet fatigue," and it's quickly becoming viral.

It's rare that we consider excessive Internet use to be problematic, outside of the occasional Twitter drama or Netflix binge. But this brand of fatigue is built to last, altering our physical and emotional state long after we log off. Excessive Internet socializing in lieu of face-to-face interaction can cause social anxiety among users, and according to a study conducted by Joseph Mazer, Ph.D and Andrew M. Ledbetter, Ph.D, can exacerbate anxiety in those with preexisting anxiety issues.

"If a person has poor face-to-face communication skills that individual will likely be more attracted to the social features of online communication," concludes Mazer of their findings. This makes logging off and staying off a harrowing task.

Depression is also deeply tied into excessive Internet use, as users are bombarded with celebratory posts about friends' achievements, ex-lovers' vacations, or celebrities' modelesque figures. Even offline, the accomplishments of others are hard to forget—and the resulting feeling of inadequacy is hard to shake.

Yet these effects can run even deeper. According to a small, but telling study conducted in China in 2011, excessive Internet use can damage the nerve wiring in the brains of teenagers. The teenaged subjects exhibited significant damage to the white matter in their brains, an effect hauntingly similar to those addicted to alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine.

"Our findings suggest that IAD (Internet Addiction Disorder) demonstrated widespread reductions of FA in major white matter pathways and such abnormal white matter structure may be linked to some behavioural impairments," explained Dr. Hao Li, one of the leaders of this study.

So for those losing pace with our exhaustively connected online world, take a breath in and a step back. It may be the healthiest distance you choose to keep.