COMPUTER DEPENDENCY

Responsible Use of the Computer

The computer is a useful tool for communication, educational and recreational purposes. When used in conjunction with the Internet, it can be used for electronic mail (e-mail), research or playing online games. It is also a powerful medium that allows people from different countries, regions and cultures to interact, make friends, do business or express their thoughts. However, like all tools, the Internet can also be misused and people can develop psychological issues as a result of overuse.

Compulsive Use of the Computer

A person may develop an unhealthy fixation on the Internet for various reasons. He or she may derive pleasurable thoughts and feelings that are emotionally and psychologically gratifying. Some people may turn to the computer or Internet for stress relief due to other personal challenges such as family conflict or relationship issues. Countless online communities provide virtual relationships that are more intimate and less threatening than real life relationships. Many websites also provide adult entertainment or allow people to indulge in online games or gambling. The amount of time spent on the computer is not the only indication that a person needs help for having addictive behaviour. Other tell-tale signs include the following:

Worrying Signs of Possible Computer Addiction

- Preoccupied with the computer or having persistent thoughts of using the Internet
- Unable to control or stop excessive behaviour despite attempts
- Feeling restless and depressed when not using the computer
- Constantly feeling lethargic and ignoring basic needs such as eating or bathing
- Displaying aggressive or abusive behaviour when prevented from using the computer
- When studies, relationship, career, health or quality of life is affected
- Involved in intimate cyber relations with strangers, putting one at risk of victimisation

Why Seeking Help is Important

For a student, fatigue and poor concentration may cause him or her to be sleepy during lessons or to skip classes; and grades may be affected as a result. The Internet does not provide lasting solution for an individual with self-esteem issue or has feelings of inadequacy or anxiety. On the contrary, the person may become socially inept and not be able to develop healthy relationships. Severe computer addiction can lead students to forsake not just their studies but also daily essential and normal activities of living.
Ways to Prevent Computer Addiction

- Identify and recognise the warning signs that could lead one to computer addiction. While total abstinence from the computer may not be possible as studies increasingly depend on it, moderating the usage is necessary to prevent addictive behaviour from developing. For students, it is important to develop a daily routine that incorporates studies and leisure that does not involve using the computer.

- Avoid using the Internet when alone. One recommendation is to place the computer or laptop in a highly visible location such as the common area of the house or campus. This may curb the tendency to visit undesirable websites.

- Develop interpersonal skills through courses, training or self-improvement resources. This is effective in forming healthy relationships and resolving issues through better communication, thus diminishing the need to seek relief from the Internet or other sources.

- Engage in meaningful social activities that take your time away from the computer. Taking up recreational sports or hobbies are not only excellent alternatives to spending time surfing the Internet but is also good for your physical and emotional well-being. It is also important to have a network of social support to provide mental and emotional help towards decreasing your dependence on the computer.

- Deep breathing, muscle relaxation and mental relaxation are also helpful in managing negative emotions. Free resources are available at the NTU Student Wellbeing Centre or its website (www.ntu.edu.sg/studentwellbeing).

- Realise that prolonged usage of the computer may impact your eyesight. According to the Health Promotion Board, myopia and other eye conditions may develop if one does not take sufficient rest for the eyes. As such, it is important to take 'vision breaks' and avoid using the computer for long periods of time (Source: www.hpb.gov.sg).

- Seeking professional counselling for addictive behaviour is preferred over talking to family or friends. Trained mental health professionals are better equipped to help identify areas of concern and develop coping strategies. The Student Wellbeing Centre provides counselling service to all NTU students in a professional and confidential setting. Visit our website at www.ntu.edu.sg/studentwellbeing or call us at 6790 4462 for details.

Useful Websites:

- Health Promotion Board: www.hpb.gov.sg
- Touch Community's Planetcrush Wellness Centre: www.planetcrush.org
- Computer Addiction Management Programme: www.camp.org.sg