



5 WAYS TECH CAUSES STRESS

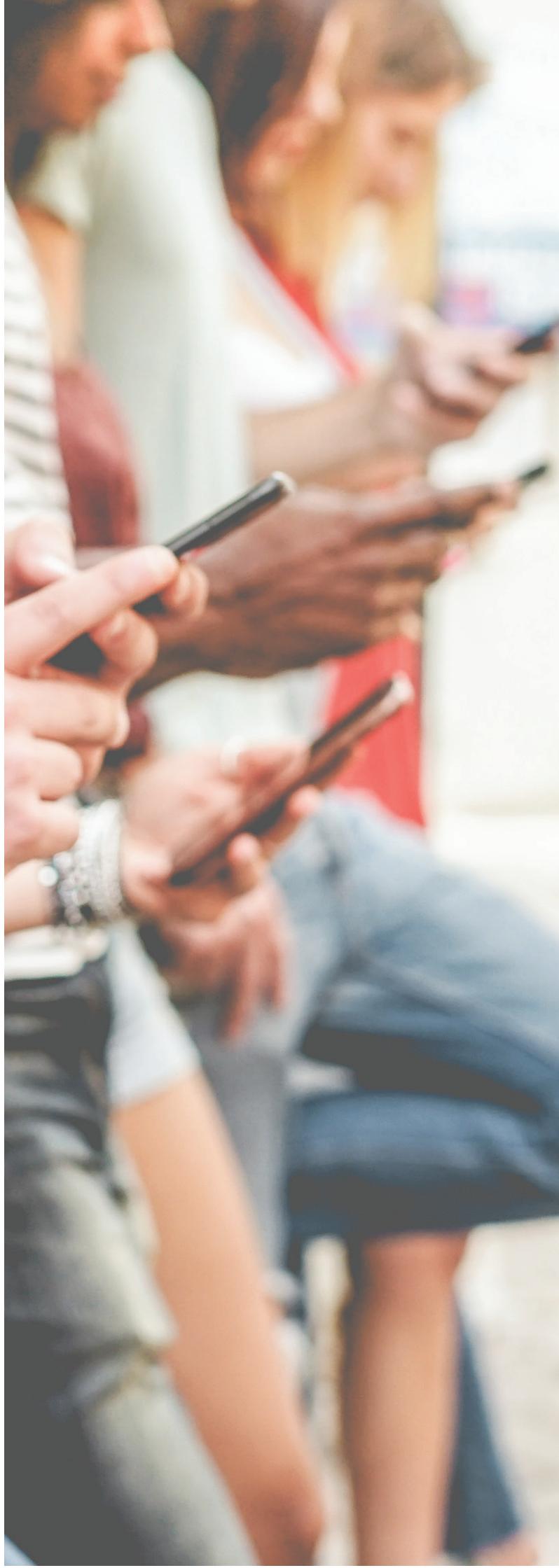
By Glen Gerreyn

5 ways tech causes stress



igital media is a two-edged sword. It has the ability to enrich our life or impoverish it. Have you ever wished you could get away from technology, even for a brief time? It's not an uncommon thought. Some people even go on 'media fasts' to promote more meaningful social interaction, create less stress and achieve better sleep. Try unplugging, even fleetingly, and experience the freedom, health and wellbeing benefits it provides.

I am not trying to go back to some pre-tech era. Technology clearly has incredible benefits. But here are five ways our digital lives are hindering, more than helping, us.





1. digital dump



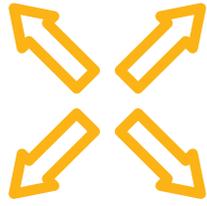
We live in a time where we are drowning in information, swamped by other people's opinions and immersed in strangers' points of view. But at

the same time, we are starving for truth. We have a tonne of knowledge, but a trickle of wisdom.

Mitchell Kaper said, "Getting information off the internet is like taking a drink from a fire hydrant." How much is really getting in? Creativity used to be found when people went deep, like a scuba diver in an ocean, and gained valuable insight. In the modern era, we surf the web, flitting across the surface but never really diving deep. We are busy and in constant motion on the surface but unproductive underneath.

Herbert Simon, an American political scientist and professor at the Carnegie Mellon University, noted, "Information consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." The digital dump minimises our attention and has us wired for constant interference, forever chasing another hyperlink.



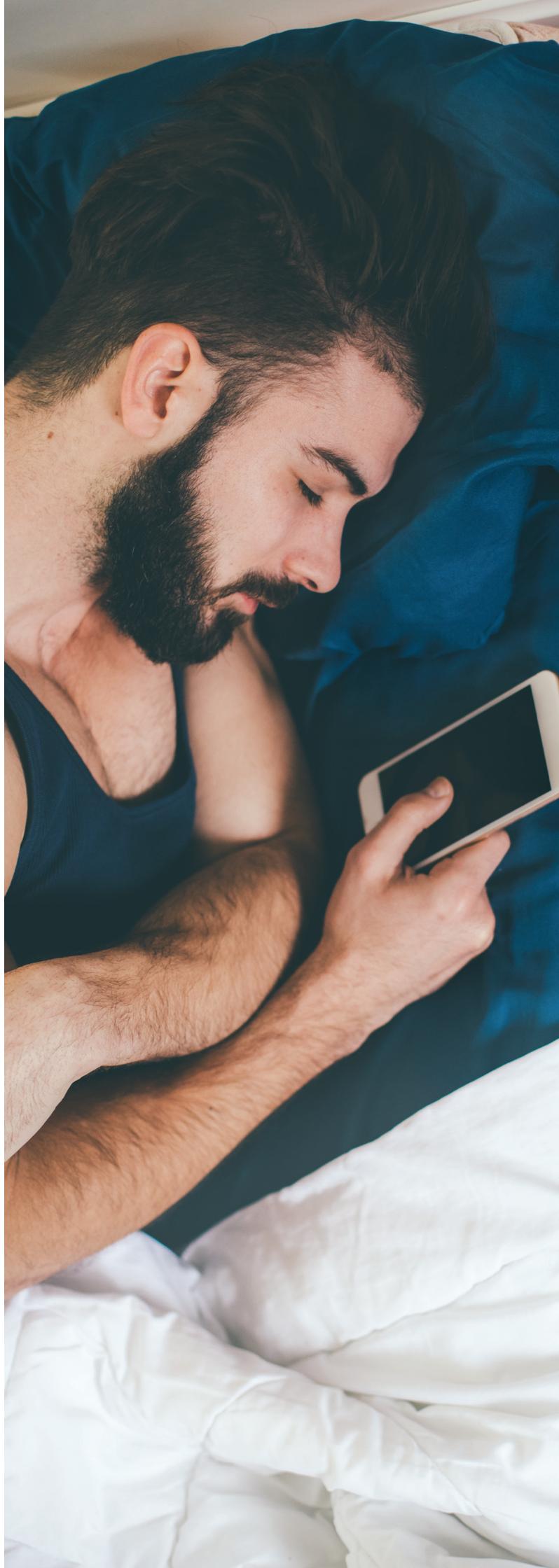


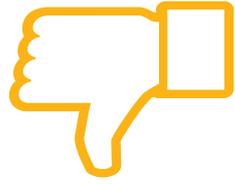
2. digital distraction



he French invented a form of torture where they would tie a man's four limbs to four horses and get the horses to run in four different directions. They called this agonising, and dismembering, form of torture — Distraction. Have you ever felt yourself yanked in different directions to the point where you felt like your mind was being tortured?

The art of self-creation — the ability to form and develop one's identity — proves to be an impossible task when bombarded by constant external inputs. I remember as a child staring out the car window for thirty minutes while my parents drove to a relative's house. Those times I spent gazing at nothing in particular were often the moments I spent planning my future or thinking about who I really was or wanted to be. Now every waking moment is taken up by another distracting 'like', 'tweet' or 'tag' which leaves us with little time for introspection.





3. digital depression

Professor Jean Twenge points to a growing body of evidence that extensive smartphone use amongst teens is driving today's younger generation to "the brink of a mental health crisis". One study indicated that eighth graders who are heavy users of social media are 27% more likely to develop depression.

In Silicon Valley, the main goal in developing a killer app is to eliminate 'friction'. Uber did this for millions of people trying to get a taxi. Amazon achieved this with its one-click purchase. While these modern-day niceties are clearly beneficial, does living a totally friction-free life help us develop resilience? For instance, to develop strength in a muscle, a marriage or a person, it must undergo resistance and grow through tension. When you are working out in a gym, does your muscle grow most on the first rep or the tenth? Most people would say the tenth, but the real answer is the eleventh. At the point of fatigue when you are just about to give up, is when your muscle will grow the most. Living 'frictionlessly', to me, is living mindlessly. Engagement, not escape, should be the goal of a meaningful life.

Another reason digital depression is on the rise is because the last thing 31% of Australians do before they go to bed at night is check their phone. Numerous studies indicate that checking your phone within thirty minutes of going to bed is linked to sleep disturbance. Unsurprisingly, one of the most consistent symptoms associated with depressive disorders is sleep disturbance.





4. digital dependency



Many people today exhibit obsessive tendencies when it comes to their digital gadgets, be it through an inability to maintain focused concentration

on a task, or the sense of disorientation and distress that accompanies the removal of their smart device. For instance, have you ever lost your phone, and then lost it!? I mean lost your mind? And then screamed, “Has anyone seen my phone?” I know we own these smart devices, but sometimes I feel they own us.

Have you ever been scrolling a bottomless feed and found yourself not even paying attention — as if you were hypnotised? For some, online activity has become a means of escape. The internal dialogue might sound like, I don’t want to be here right now thinking about what I need to be doing. I want to be somewhere else. But if you get used to not being here right now and dealing with the current situation, there may come a time when you can’t pay attention or be present anymore.

Ramett Chawla a major player in the global technology scene said, “It’s our generation’s crack cocaine. People are addicted. We experience withdrawals. We are so driven by this drug, getting one hit elicits truly peculiar reactions. I’m talking about ‘Likes’. They’ve inconspicuously emerged as the first digital drug to dominate our culture.”





5. digital dementia



igital Dementia is a term coined by neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer. This term is used to describe how overindulging in digital technologies breaks down our cognitive abilities. Our short-term memory starts to deteriorate because we outsource our memory to our smartphone. As a child, I could remember and recall at least forty phone numbers of friends and family members. Today I can barely remember my own phone number. I have not committed another phone number to memory for about twenty years — this kind of information is now outsourced to our phones. The ability to remember street names and be guided by landmarks is all superfluous because my GPS can handle all that information. The problem is, our brain is like a muscle — either we use it or we lose it.

Oliver Sacks, a British neurologist, said, “Whether it is by learning a new language, traveling to a new place, developing a passion for beekeeping or simply thinking about an old problem in a new way, all of us can find ways to stimulate our brains to grow. Just as physical activity is essential to maintaining a healthy body, challenging our brain, keeping it active, engaged, flexible and playful is not only fun, it is essential to cognitive fitness.”

Keep your mind active and alive. Allow room for deep contemplation and reflection. Immerse yourself in a creative project. Use your hands to engage in the world around you and do more things that make you forget about your smart device.



The solution to all five of these digital stresses is digital dexterity. The ability to manoeuvre our way skilfully through a maze of online madness by practising mindfulness, selective attention and developing the discipline required to not respond to every digital mandate instantly.

Want more?

**These ideas are discussed comprehensively in our
Brilliant Young Mind Seminar — Learning in the Age of Digital Distraction.**

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