

Effect of Social Networking on Health

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Introduction

Lifestyle refers to the way of life of a person which is often characterized by common behavioural patterns which may be detrimental to health. In case you are wondering why I started by defining lifestyle; considering the topic, I am valid. The reason for this is because for the past five years or more, “*facebooking*” has become incorporated into everyday life.

Health is inseparable from life-style, because our lifestyle choices affect our health. The World Health Organization defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease. Social networking affects the physical, mental and social aspects of our life, therefore, it influences health.

The Situation

Social networking makes individuals use computers and other mobile devices to stay connected perpetually to the internet. In a bid to remain in contact with a virtual network of friends, individuals endure long hours of sitting, standing or lying in bad postures. This may result directly in physical health issues, such as computer repetitive stress injuries comprising bad posture, back pain and hurting hands. A typical day for a young adult plays out with social networking as a compulsory activity. Imagine a young man who sits with his laptop, surfing internet social networks while seeping “La-casera” and mincing a mouthful amount of “Gala” for hours. Two things are happening. First, this individual is not eating healthily and secondly, he is sedentary as he

has not been ambulant for a long period. In some cases, there may be loss of appetite because such individuals are engrossed in social networking. When the internet service is lost due to network problem, he mutters a cuss and continues trying to connect to a bad network service rather than laying it aside.

Implications

Studies have shown some of the disabilities of internet addiction such as loss of appetite, irritability when cut off from computer use, a decline in appearance or hygiene, academic problems, withdrawal from friends and declining interest in hobbies..

Sedentary life-style is a major underlying cause of death, disease and disability. It is one of the ten leading causes of death and disability in the world. It doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and obesity, cancer of the colon, breast cancer, high blood pressure, lipid disorders and osteoporosis.

Teenagers who use *facebook* have been shown to have narcissistic tendencies; young adults who use *facebook* often has been shown to have mania, anti-social behavior, anxiety, depression, aggressiveness, and early distractible which negatively impairs learning.

Social networking sites have played significant roles in making people more isolated, reducing the level of “face to face” contact which could alter the way gene works, upset immune responses, affect hormone level, the function of arteries and influence mental performance negatively. This may indirectly increase the risk of cancer, stroke and heart disease.

Prolonged internet use may also cause insomnia. Any individual affected feels excessively fatigued during the day because he/she gets up early or stays up late to spend more time online. This results in disobedience and acting out especially in teenagers

Studies have reported disorders associated with prolonged computer use. This includes computer vision syndrome, infrequent blinking and repetitive stress injuries. Computer vision syndrome symptoms may be aggravated by continued regular use of a computer for about two or more hours a day. An individual is at risk when he exceeds two hours of computer use in a day. Pixels (character) on computer screen do not have well defined edges; they are brightest at the center and diminish in intensity towards the edges making it very difficult for the eyes to maintain focus. The person then experiences any or some of these symptoms: eye fatigue, double vision, headaches, red and watery eyes, dry eye, photophobia, temporary near sightedness, neck and

shoulder aches. Blinking is important for spreading tears to form an even film on the eye surface. While working on a computer, the blink rate reduces to 5 times/minute from the normal of 15times/minutes because of continuous staring at the screen. Thus, in the absence of adequate blinking, the eyes become dry and irritated.

Social networking has becoming a part of our existence, yet it threatens the very core of our social interactions. It is beginning to infantilize the adult human brain into that of little kids who are attracted by buzzing noises, bright lights, small attention span and living for the moment.

Not only does social networking undermine our social skills and our ability to read body language, it fails us the opportunity to appreciate feelings and emotions. This is because conversing “face to face” with someone, engages an exchange of information, expressions and emotions through the sense organs.

Social networking adds to our work load. The enthusiasm of renewing old friendship and retaining new ones, waiting for comment on photos, anticipating for reactions on *posts*, checking up the latest social media gossip and managing information about other people, adds more work to the schedule of a day.

It is not all bad news because social networking helps information spread. People acquire new health practices from living within networks comprising dense clusters of connections. This helps reinforce healthy practices because people need to hear a new idea repeatedly before making change e.g. quitting smoking. It provides access to useful tools for teaching in compelling ways that engage most students. It also helps to disseminate information about impending natural disasters and other environmental hazards faster, farther and wider than imagined.

Conclusion

Although social networks are tools that displace rather than enhance social interaction, predispose and increase risks of certain diseases, affect adversely mental functions. However, they are indispensable, it is only important to create a balance between using the internet and living a healthy life.

JOKE

Tenant: Oh, Thank God, my salary and arrears has just been paid. He then updates it as his status on *facebook*.

Landlord: Sees it, screams and updates “Like” on the status.