

## Electronic addicts

Written by PHILIP S. CHUA, MD, FACS, FPCS  
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ADVANCES in science and technology bolster progress in almost all facets of human endeavor, making most (unfortunately, not all) people more comfortable, more efficient, and more productive, not to mention other benefits we derive from them as individuals and as a society.

The birth of the mind-boggling computer ushered in one of the brightest inventions of man, which enabled the exponential developments and proliferation of very efficient machines, devices and gadgets.

Just like most progress, the computer age also brings with it some health, behavioral, social and even legal consequences.

Its abuse leads to electronic addiction.

Much like dealing with drugs, tobacco and alcohol, personal and societal discipline is fundamental.

Of the 7 billion people on planet Earth, 6.8 billion have mobile phones.

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In the United States, 92 percent have their own mobile phone.

In the Philippines, there are about 30.4 million mobile phone users in 2017.

There are 84 percent of Americans who have a computer, and 73 percent of them have internet connection.

Tablets for kids are very popular today.

### **When was the word “computer” coined?**

It was in 1613 when the word “computer” was first used, describing a human who performed calculations.

This word lingered until the industrial revolution at the end of the 19th century developed machines whose main purpose was calculating.

The first automatic computing machines was developed by Charles Babbage in 1822, but it was 15 years later when he proposed the first general mechanical computer, which was called the Analytical Engine.

The first electromechanical binary programmable functional computer, called Z1, was created by Konrad Zuse, a German, in his parents' living room between 1936 and 1938.

The computers then were huge, occupying an entire room, compared to today's miniature and a lot more powerful devices.

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But the foundation for theories about computing and computers was originally proposed by Alan Turing in 1936, the Turing machine.

The fundamentals Turing set have enabled the development of our computers of today.

### **When was portable computer born?**

Osborne I, released in April 1981, was truly the first portable computer or laptop, developed by Adam Osborne.

It weighed 24.5 pounds, with a 5-inch display, 64 KB of memory, two floppy drives, and ran the CP/M 2.2 operating system, and a modem, priced at \$1,795.

It was in 1975 when Ed Roberts came up with the term “personal computer,” introducing his Altair 8800, although many considered Kenbak-1, which came out in 1971 for \$750 as the first personal computer.

### **Is computer addiction real?**

Yes, it is.

I know because I love electronics and feel the temptation.

Usually it is a combination of computer (internet) addiction and cell phone (text or call) addiction.

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The signs and symptoms are very obvious among young and old alike, and even among toddlers.

They would rather delay everything else, even their meals or sleep, in favor of computing, browsing, doing social media, or gaming, or texting or calling.

They sleep and wake up with a cell phone or tablet or laptop in bed.

Lo-bat drives them anxious and angry, and toddlers have been known to throw tantrums and cry.

### **How serious is the problem?**

The situation is getting more and more serious around the world where these devices are available.

Parents are quite aware of this addiction, saying this is a new form of Attention Deficit Disorder, labeling it computer/mobile phone ADD.

Pediatricians and psychologists are seeing more and more adolescents and even toddlers with this problem.

School performance suffers too.

Those addicted to computer games have increased risk for restlessness, anxiety, depression, weight gain and metabolic syndrome.

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Carpal Tunnel and vision problem is also common from computer abuse.

The question of radiation is still an unsettled matter, even with the use of mobile phones.

### **What is the social impact of this addiction?**

Electronic addicts keep to themselves.

They are in their own private world for hours, no talking to anyone, not even to one another, much less their parents.

The same goes true with toddlers, who would develop attention deficit, with their external (non-electronic) environment, poor eating habit, slower speech development, and diminished social skills.

These are also found among older children and some adults.

There were reports that kids had threatened to shoot their parents for cutting their computer use.

Misuse or abuse of social media could also ruin privacy, invite identity theft, expose children/teenagers to dangerous situations from criminals, and potential legal dilemmas.

### **Does this addiction affect family life?**

Definitely.

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When everybody, parents included, go separate ways at home, in their own little cocoon, their own private world, with their electronic device, and not talk to each other, or even eat or pray together, family bonding is negatively impacted.

Unless wise and sober house rules are promulgated by both parents and siblings with regards to the use of electronic devices, including computer toys, electronic addiction could destroy the family and the individual members.

Imagine the children not paying attention to their parents, or grandparents, or to each other, or even to their friends in school, who are likewise addicted.

When electronics is not only a part of children's life but the only life they have, they will face a future of health, social and psychological issues.

To the addicts, the real life becomes boring, the virtual world, exciting.

### **Are electronic devices that bad?**

Of course, not.

These wonderful devices can enable adults, children and toddlers to expand their vision, knowledge, skills, and help fulfill their dreams with a treasury of information and data, all available in split seconds, at their fingertips.

The regular use of Alexa, Cortana, Siri, Google Assistant or Google itself is not only convenient but efficient and a joy.

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They are enhancers, enablers and facilitators, providing the user instant access to information, time, weather, music, restaurant or movie reservations, shopping, and hundreds of other uses.

Artificial intelligence, robots included, would someday be a regular household fixture for most, if not all, homes.

The internet today allows you to journey all around the galaxy, without having to leave your home or office, saving you gasoline and airfares.

And they are very entertaining too.

When used for family game or entertainment, etc., electronics are good for bonding.

The kitchen knife could be used to prepare meals for your loved ones, or used to hurt them or yourself.

All really depends on how you intelligently and wisely you use the electronic devices you have.

They are actually a fantabulous magical gem, one that even elevates the level of the happy hormones in us, one reason why it is addicting.

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