

Oughton Health

Oughton Primary School Health & Well-Being Newsletter

Edition 5 Spring 2020

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter, Oughton Health, our very own newsletter with a focus on promoting good health, both physical and mental, as well as general good well-being. In this edition, we focus on the use of electronic devices and explore their impact (both positive and negative) on our physical and mental health.

As you will be very aware, we are raising a new generation of children who lead device-driven lifestyles and with Christmas just behind us, you will probably find yourself surrounded by all manner of devices! While computers and hand-held devices appear to have become more necessity than luxury, we all need to remember that we are not inseparable from them!

You may be one of the many parents who are battle-weary, having a daily fight to tear your children away from their phones, tablet computers and whatever other electronic device they may have. It is always so tempting to give in, believing that our children will have to learn to be tech-savvy sooner rather than later. But we all need to be aware of health problems that could arise from too much screen time and poor tech habits, besides the risks of addiction-see overleaf for some of the possible health risks.

But you can rest easy - using technology for up to two hours a day is considered quite safe according to research! All is not lost if we teach ourselves and our children to develop good tech habits. If we remember the two-hour guideline (or limit it to even less) we can keep ourselves and our youngsters tech-happy and healthy too! Alongside setting time limits, there are other ways that we, as Parents/Carers, can also do to help - see below for ideas:

- Increase outdoor physical activity time. Experts in Singapore recommend that younger children spend an average of three hours a day outdoors to protect them from the onset of myopia (short sightedness). A more active lifestyle will also stave off obesity, keep us/ them fit and keep our minds off the devices!
- Take five-minute vision breaks after every 30-40 minutes of device time. The eye is at its most relaxed when it's focusing at a distance of about 6m away. Greenery has been found to be especially soothing. Closing our eyes or using eye drops if needed can help.
- Build in family movement breaks where arms are rested and perform some stretches. Get up to keep blood circulating.
- Help set up the computer station to suit your or your child's height (see box for guidance). Consider investing in an ergonomic chair, and teach yourself/ your child to type or play gently, as unnecessary force increases the risk of overuse injuries.
- Consider introducing smart apps like fitness trackers, or online apps for mindfulness or focus training instead of, or alongside, gaming.
- Remind ourselves and teach our youngsters to pay attention to our surroundings — devices are the most hazardous as a distraction, especially on roads. How often do you see people crossing the road without looking whilst engrossed in their phone?! Even at home, it is easy to catch a sharp table corner or bump into someone carrying hot food when we are otherwise engaged!
- Come to a family agreement to put devices down for an agreed time to encourage more face-to-face interaction.
- To make sure you/ your child gets enough sleep at night, sleep experts discourage using devices in the hour before bed as it overstimulates the mind and prevents a decent nights sleep.



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Electronic devices....can they really be harmful to our health?
- See also attached "Digital Parenting" for further guidance

What is the proper posture for computer use?

The computer screen should be at or slightly lower than eye level. The main source of light (e.g. window) should not shine straight into your face or onto the screen.

The keyboard should be at a height whereby your forearms are roughly parallel to the floor. Your elbows should rest comfortably at your sides. Ideally, an ergonomic chair should be used that allows your spine to hold its natural curve.

Your feet should rest flat on the floor (you can also use a footstool). The mouse should be placed as close to the keyboard as possible, at the same level as described for the keyboard, so that your wrists and hands are naturally positioned. Use your whole arm, not just the wrist, when using the mouse.

Surely there have to be some positives about using electronic devices?

Do not despair! All is not lost. Some research suggests that gaming may have positive effects on children's cognitive and social skills:

- Improved cognitive abilities.
- Improved problem-solving skills and logic.
- Increased hand-to-eye coordination.
- Greater multi-tasking ability.
- Faster and more accurate decision-making.
- Enhanced prosocial behaviours.
- Better eyesight (attention to detail)

If devices are used moderately and sensibly, and their effect on our children's physical and mental health is monitored, then gaming and electrical devices can enhance their lives!



Possible health problems associated to electronic device use if we do not take care of ourselves:

1. BAD POSTURE, BACK ACHEs, NECK AND SHOULDER STRAIN

If you sit hunched over a device, pretty soon, that hunch will be there even when the device is not! To add to this, pain will start to be felt in back and shoulder muscles too. An uncomfortable seat, a set-up with poor ergonomics, sitting too long or slouching lazily are all things which will contribute to the problem. Laptop computers can aggravate things because the monitor and keyboard are so close and users find themselves either lifting their shoulders to type, or hunching their shoulders to see.

2. PAIN IN WRISTS — CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

This is a classic injury resulting from overuse of devices. It appears through pain, stiffness or swelling in the fingers and wrist.

Maybe you or your child are twisting your wrist to use the mouse in an awkward way? Or playing a game that makes forceful or repetitive movements? Or maybe you are messaging for long periods? All of these things can cause injury to nerves and tendons. "It hurts when I write with my pen" is an excuse for not doing homework that you don't want to hear!

3. EYE STRAIN

Dry eyes, a burning sensation, problems focusing... these are symptoms of eye strain that all device users commonly face.

Bright light, high screen contrasts, glare and flickering images may make a game or video more exciting, but really take their toll on our eyes. Squinting at a small hand-held device adds to the strain. An enraptured kid is also less likely to blink, which makes things worse.

Additionally, not spending time on outdoor activities exposes children to the risk of developing myopia.

4. HEADACHES

Children seldom get headaches, but too much screen-time can bring one on. The usual cause, as well as stress, is a combination of muscle tension at the base of the skull and an assault on the eyes.

5. STRESS

Time spent on devices may feel like the norm, but studies have shown that overuse increases stress levels. Constant stress over a prolonged period could adversely affect the heart, sleep, digestion and emotions.

6. PHYSICAL FATIGUE

Too much time on a device does not just drain the brain, but it tires the body too. Being still for long periods reduces blood circulation and can put stress on muscles and joints. The result is that we feel tired without even having had to go to the effort of moving much!

7. POOR SLEEP PATTERNS

Research has confirmed exposure to mobile phones and other devices can cause changes in brain activity and sleep disturbances. This could also be a stress symptom.

8. OBESITY

Tech devices can make for an easy life as they keep our children occupied, but that lack of physical activity is a major contributing factor to childhood obesity and its accompanying risks.

9. COMPROMISED IMMUNITY

A 2011 study by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine revealed 92% of hand phones harbour bacteria, including 16% with the dangerous E.coli strain. In our climate, such bacteria can survive for hours! After the past year, we are all aware of how germs can then be easily transferred from person to person resulting in illness.

Some researchers also recommend that headphones be used at a minimum 20cm away, and for limited periods, to reduce radiation exposure.