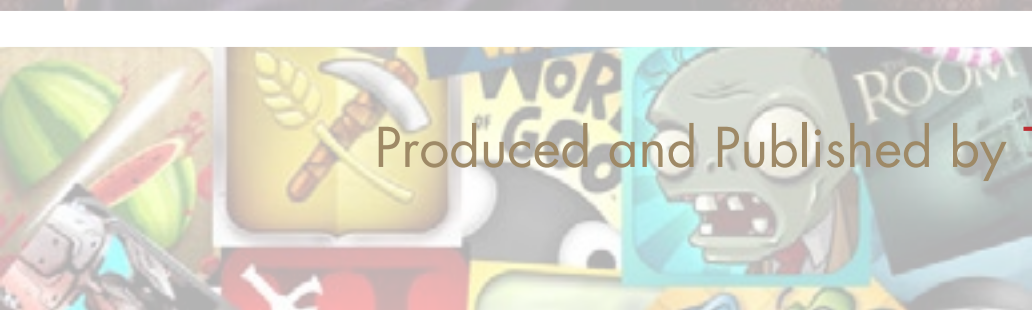
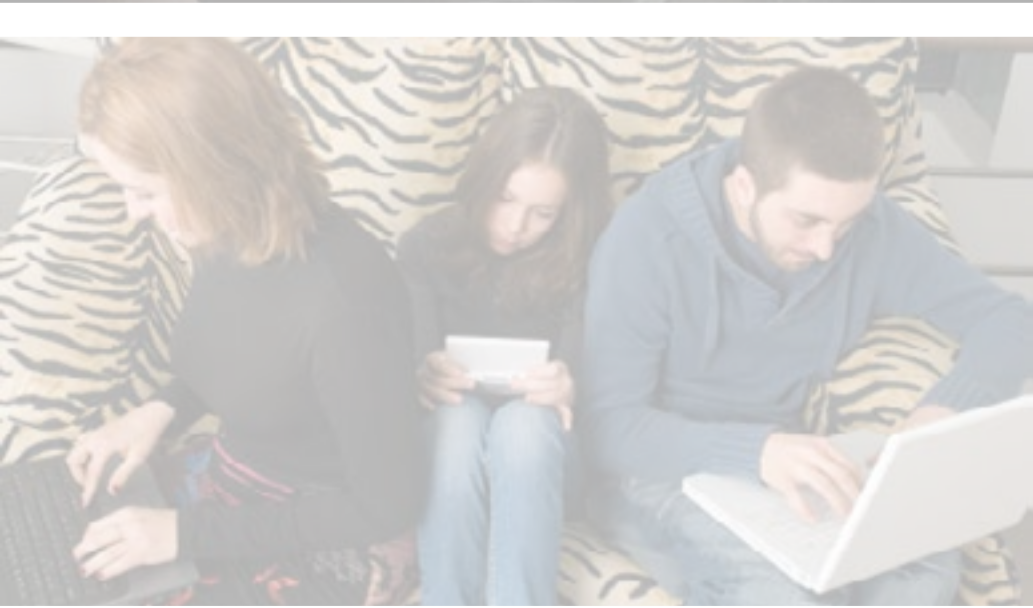
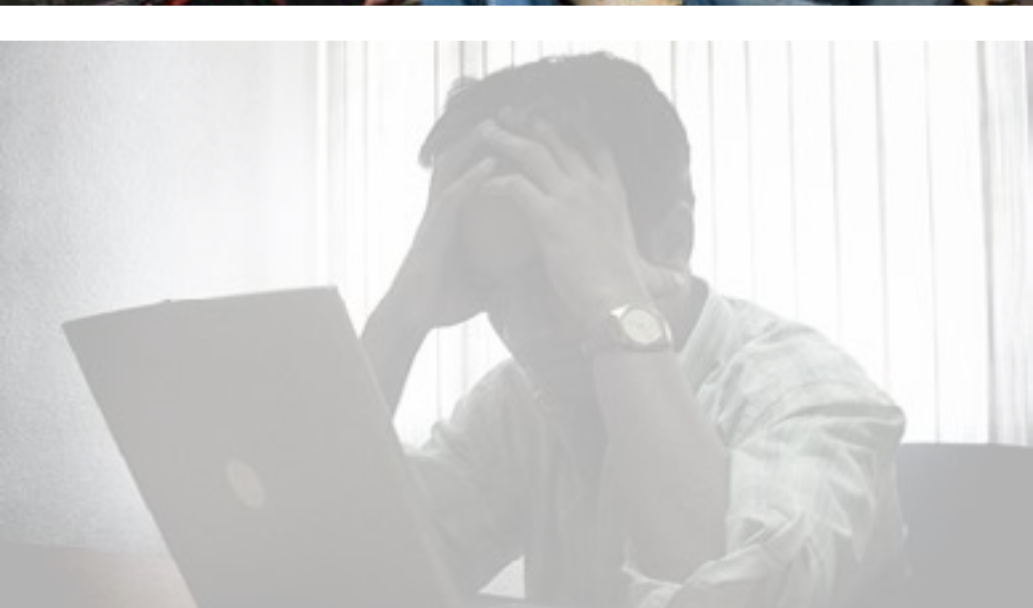
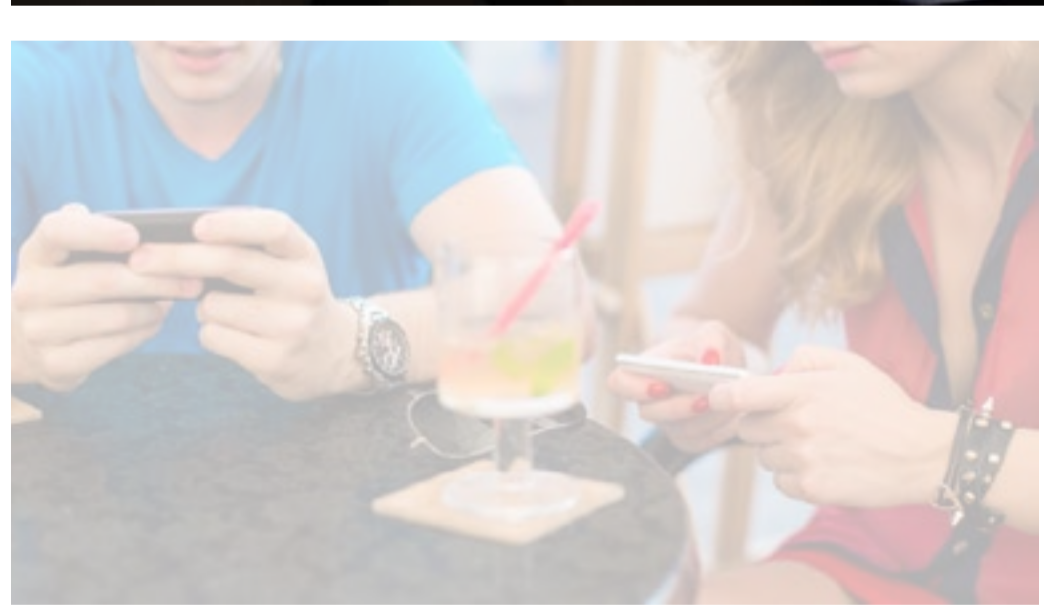
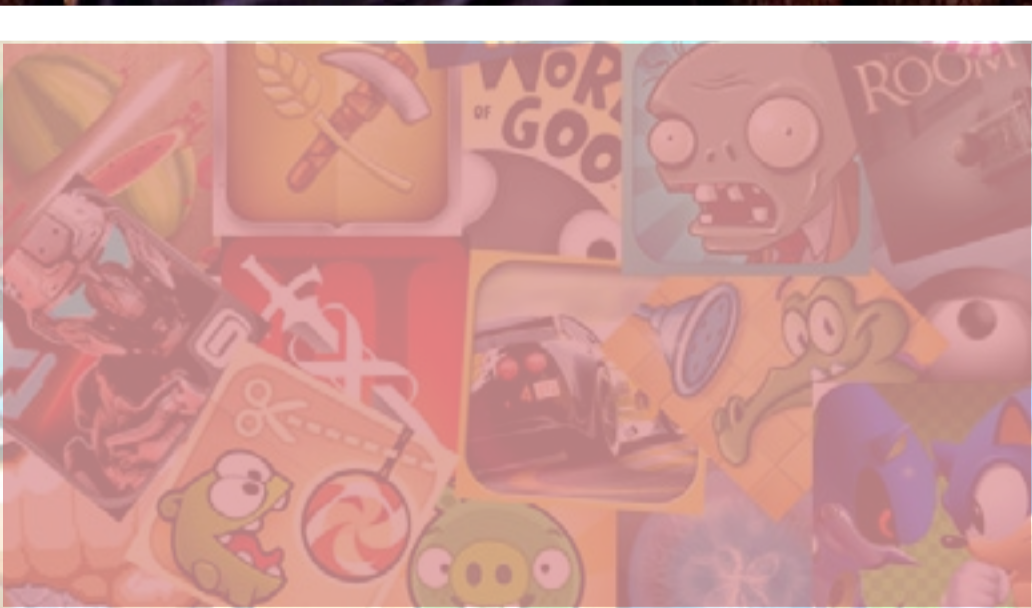


INTERNET ADDICTION

PART I



What is internet addiction?

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Internet addiction disorder is a broad term used to describe excessive use of computers which interferes seriously with one's ability to lead a healthy life. This disorder, as it relies on computer technology, is relatively new; as a result, understanding of the causes, nature, and treatment of the disorder is evolving. New technologies and uses of computers are emerging all the time, making the study of internet addiction a developing field. In addition, while other addictions such as alcoholism and gambling have been studied for many decades, internet addiction is so new that there is less research available.

In this book, we will present you with the latest research findings about internet addiction. But even while our knowledge is growing about this addiction, there are already significant concerns about its effects.

Headlines from major news outlets illustrate the scope of the problem. According to the *Huffington Post*, in South Korea, there are at least 160,000 children aged 5 to 9 who are internet addicted. In Japan, the *New York Times* claims there to be an estimated 500,000 children aged from 12 to 18 who are addicted to the internet. And in China, approximately 96% of teenagers use instant messaging with 10% meeting the requirements for an addiction. While many studies are conducted in Asia, there is also cause for concern in Western countries. The prevalence rate of internet addiction for studies published in North America and Europe ranges from 1.5% to 8.2%.

While research on addictive disorders has typically focused on substance and alcohol abuse, the definition of addiction has broadened in the past decade to include behaviours which meet key criteria. These include: impaired ability to meet life's challenges, inability to control the addictive behaviour, and increased need and tolerance. Internet addiction has come to meet all of these criteria.

Though much research on internet addiction focuses on young people, there is concern for adults, as well. Internet addiction can continue from adolescence into adulthood, or it can begin when the pressures of work create great amounts of stress. Moreover, there are particular forms of this addiction that are predominantly found in adults, such as gambling and pornography. As the internet continues to expand, there will likely be greater numbers of people who find themselves caught in computer-based addiction. But even as the iterations of this internet addiction continue to proliferate, there are some underlying similarities with other addictions, as discussed in the next section.

What Causes Internet Addiction?

The most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)*, has not yet classified internet addiction as a clinical mental health problem. Rather, it has listed it as a disorder for further study. Even so, many addiction specialists have been finding their clients struggling with internet and technology abuse, and consider this a new channel for the expression of addictive behaviour brought on by the disease of addiction.

Despite the newness of the disorder, researchers have found it has a similar biological and genetic basis to other process-based addictions. A process-based addiction is one in which the addict becomes both addicted to the process and the actual activity. For example, with alcoholism, the reward centres of the brain light up when preparing to drink alcohol. While the feeling of intoxication is desired, the mere expectation of drinking brings pleasure. The same pattern of rewards is true for internet addiction.



Recent research has found that when people play video games, pathways in their brains are triggered in the same way that a drug addict's brain is influenced by a particular substance. This neurological response affects the reward centres of the brain, with the outcome, in the extreme, of addiction.

In addition to causing similar responses in the brain as drug use, the use of computers may also have a genetic component. In recent years, there has been mounting evidence for a genetically heritable basis for alcoholism. As it is the most researched addiction, data on alcoholism is the most extensive. In the future, there may be genetic links found to other addictions. When we consider the neurological basis for addiction, it certainly seems possible that there might be a genetic component underlying more than one addictive behaviour. As research continues into internet addiction, a genetic basis for the disorder may be uncovered.

In the meantime, it is helpful to understand internet addiction in the context of other addictive behaviours. As we will see in the next section, in addition to the genetic and neurological basis for addiction, there are also common triggers which cue addictive behaviour.

What are Some Common Triggers for Internet Addiction?

Triggers, or cues, for internet addiction can be divided into 3 broad categories. These categories apply not only to internet addiction, but to other binge-like behaviours. Keep in mind that while the individual triggers might vary person to person, and also vary according to the type of addiction, there are nevertheless similarities in the way that the triggers initiate and maintain addiction.

Behavioural Cues

The first category of triggers concerns cues which initiate the addictive behaviour. For example, if someone has an alcohol addiction, and they see a bar, it might cue them to engage in drinking. Similarly, when an individual with an internet addiction sees an internet café, he or she might be triggered to engage in excessive computer use.



Thoughts and Feelings

The second category of triggers is thoughts and feelings. The thoughts and emotions which trigger addictive behaviour may be negative, but they can also be positive. When someone with an addiction experiences a negative thought, they may engage in the addictive behaviour. For example, when thinking about work, the thought may arise that there is too much to get

done. Along with the thought, a negative emotion such as anxiety might be present. In order to avoid these emotions, someone with an internet addiction may use their computer excessively.

Interestingly, addictive behaviour can also be triggered by positive thoughts or feelings. Say, for example, you do well on an exam or get positive feedback at work. You may reward yourself with an addictive behaviour, such as playing games online. This pattern is also commonly seen with alcohol and other substance abuse disorders, when positive feelings are thought to be augmented by using the substance.

Events and Occurrences

The third category of triggers is actual events in one's life. Usually these will be negative events, such as failing an exam, losing a job, breaking up with a romantic partner, or other similar negative occurrences. Depending on the individual, the event may be major or relatively minor. An example of a minor event could be losing your keys, waiting in line, or being stuck in traffic. All of these might trigger an addictive behaviour such as an internet addiction.

These categories are useful ways of understanding what triggers an addictive behaviour. As you will learn in the section on treatment, effectively recovering from internet addiction requires addressing these and other factors. Before we examine treatment, we will go into more detail about specific types of internet addiction.

Types of Internet Addiction

Internet addiction has identifiable subtypes, based on which activities are predominant. Understanding the different types of internet addiction is helpful for several reasons. First, it can help individuals see more clearly whether their computer usage has become problematic. Behaviours that might be common among ones peer group might actually be problematic when viewed from a larger context. Second, understanding the particular type of internet addiction an individual has assists in effective treatment.

Online and Smartphone Gaming



There is growing concern about addictive behaviour related to computer games. The cause of concern focuses on online games, which are often highly interactive and create virtual worlds for the user. Some of these games are multi-player, allowing users to play in real-time with friends or strangers online. Others simply use the online interface to host the game. Whatever the format, these games are designed to attract users to play repeatedly and for extended periods.

Cybersex and pornography

Cybersex and pornography have become common uses of the internet in the last decade. Of course, pornography was available long before the internet arrived. However, the greater availability, anonymity, and ease of use which the internet provides have increased the predominance of pornographic addiction. It is relatively easy to spend hours alone at home looking at pornographic images, but this can have negative consequences on relationships, work, and happiness.

Email, Chat, Instant Messaging, and Social Network

The internet has revolutionized the way that we communicate. But with the constant availability of connection, it can be hard to stay focused on work, relationships, or the real world. Many people today find themselves constantly checking email, chat, instant messaging services, and particularly social networks. Though these services seem innocuous, they can significantly affect how individuals are able to attend to their lives.

Cyber-relationships and Online Dating

Modern life can be quite isolating. In order to connect, many people turn to online relationships or internet dating websites. This can be useful if a meaningful connection is found. However, there are several ways that these sites can become problematic.



First, due to the large number of online profiles to view, use of these services may become excessive. Second, online relationships can be based in fantasy and set unrealistic expectations for real-life relationships. Finally, around 50% of people online are dishonest about characteristics such as age, appearance, marital status, and gender. Meeting someone in person after having an online relationship can be a profound disappointment.

Other Internet Compulsions

The internet is vast and constantly evolving. Though it is not possible to make an exhaustive list of internet addictions, here are some other ways that internet use can become problematic: stock trading, online auction shopping, online gambling, and checking news and sports updates. In the future, as the internet evolves, there will undoubtedly be more addictions resulting from excessive computer, smartphone, and tablet use.



If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be addicted to the internet – in our next release we will cover:

- **The criteria used by professionals to assess this specific behavioural disorder**
- **Warning signs of internet addiction AND**
- **How it can be treated**

INTERNET ADDICTION PART II will be released on 30th April 2014