



## Healthy Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products

### Press Release

8 July 2014

#### DH's report on health effects of use of Internet and electronic screen products released

The Department of Health (DH) today (July 8) released the Report of Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products. The Report contains recommendations on healthy use of Internet and electronic screen products for children, adolescents, parents and teachers.

The Consultant Community Medicine (Student Health Service) of the DH, Dr Thomas Chung, said "We are very concerned about the potential health risks on children and adolescents relating to the increasing use of Internet and related electronic screen products."

He added, "While acknowledging the benefits that Internet and related technology could bring to our everyday life, the Report highlights the potential health risks that we should be aware of and makes recommendations to help our children and adolescents in using the Internet and electronic screen products wisely."

In view of the rapid development of Internet and electronic screen products, such as televisions, computer games, e-books and magazines, computers and mobile phones, and the related health concerns on children and adolescents, the DH convened the Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products (Advisory Group) in December 2013 to address the concern.

To facilitate the work of the Advisory Group, the DH conducted a survey on the use of Internet and electronic screen products among pre-school children, primary and secondary school students as well as their parents and teachers in December 2013. Among the 4,300 questionnaires collected, it found that the use of Internet and electronic screen products was very popular.

The survey revealed that the median age of pre-schoolers started watching television is 8 months, that for watching DVD is 10 months, that for using tablet PC is 16 months and that for using computer is 24 months. The youngest starting age of using these electronic screen products was at 1 month or below. Only 14% and 12% of the parents would always accompany their pre-school children in using tablet personal computer and computer respectively.

Moreover, 20% of primary and secondary school students spent more than 3 hours a day on the Internet. Around 50 % of parents considered their children had spent excessive amount of time on the Internet and affected their daily lives, and 64 % of parents had always or occasionally quarrelled with their children due to use of the Internet or electronic screen products.

The survey also indicated that 37% expressed that they had always or occasionally given up outdoor activities, 49% had always or occasionally had depleted sleeping time, 45% had always or occasionally perceived their academic performance being affected due to use of the Internet or electronic screen products, and 19% had always or occasionally had deceived their parents, friends or teachers on the time of going online.

"There is strong evidence to support proportional relationship between obesity and screen time, which is more relating to sedentary lifestyle and other associated behaviour during these activities like snacking and decreased sleep time," Dr Chung said.

The Advisory Group considered that it was more important to prevent children from spending excessive amount of time on Internet and electronic screen products that would affect their other more important tasks or daily routine.

Making reference to information and suggestions by relevant overseas and local authorities, the Advisory Group made the following recommendations in the Report:

1. Parents and teachers are recommended to adopt the general principles of SAFE ACTS, i.e.

- ▶ Show children the right attitude
- ▶ Aware of the benefits and risks
- ▶ Facilitate a balanced life
- ▶ Empower children to face challenges
- ▶ Agree with children on the rules of use
- ▶ Communicate openly
- ▶ Trust and respect children
- ▶ Seek help when needed

2. Children and adolescents are also recommended to adopt the general principles of DARES, i.e.

- ▶ Develop a balanced life
- ▶ Aware of the benefits and risks
- ▶ Respect and trust parents and teachers
- ▶ Effectively communicate with parents and teachers
- ▶ Seek help when needed

The Advisory Group also recommended a set of 10 health tips as follows:

1. Be physically active, go outdoor
2. Engage in interactive activities in real life
3. Limit screen time and choose screen activities wisely
4. Blink, break and rest
5. Adopt proper setting
6. Protect hearing, prevent accident and pay attention to hygiene
7. Ensure adequate sleep time and appropriate environment
8. Be aware of cyber-safety
9. Behave oneself when using Internet and social networking sites
10. Restrict access to inappropriate content

Also attending the press conference today, Dr Tak-chuen Ko of College of Ophthalmologists of Hong Kong pointed out that myopia was associated to near work task, and overuse of electronic screen products will increase the risk of myopia progression. Dr Chor-yin Lam of Hong Kong College of Orthopaedic Surgeons also remarked that people using these products often neglect proper posture and movement, resulting in musculoskeletal symptoms including pain in the neck, back and upper limbs.

In addition, Dr Anita Tsang of Hong Kong College of Paediatricians stressed that parents' face to face interactions with young children were very important to their social development. Dr Ronnie Pao of Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists also supplemented that addiction, cyber-bullying and other psychosocial health issues were important concerns relating use of Internet and electronic screen products.

Dr Thomas Chung said, "The Report provides useful recommendations that could help minimize the risks on related health problems."

This is the first step to remind the public and relevant stakeholders to take appropriate measures to minimise the adverse health effects relating to the use of Internet and electronic screen products in our young generations. The DH will continue to monitor the latest development and join hands with other partners to take further steps to promote the healthy use of Internet and electronic screen products.

Dr Chung expressed his appreciation and gratitude to all members of the Advisory Group for their professional advice and invaluable contributions.

The executive summary and full version of the Report are now available on the website of DH's Student Health Service ([http://www.shs.gov.hk/english/internet/health\\_effects.html](http://www.shs.gov.hk/english/internet/health_effects.html)).

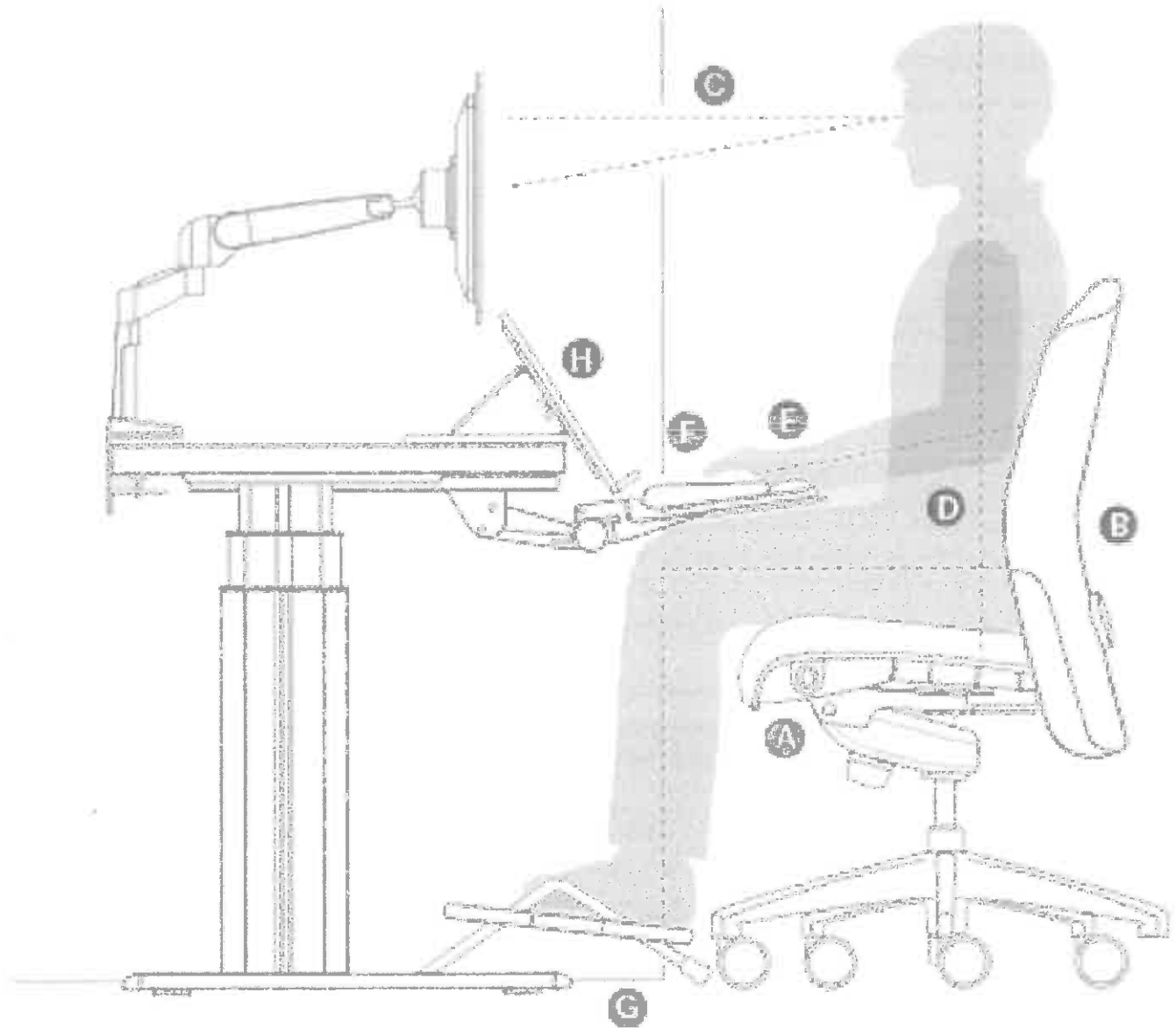
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# Health Conditions associated with Problematic Technology Use

Posted in Health Conditions (</the-problem/health-conditionsassociated-with-problematic-use.html>)

## Are your health symptoms are related to your device?



General and excessive use of technology, video games, smart phones and the Internet is associated with a variety of health risks. Users run the risk of developing eThrombosis, carpal tunnel syndrome, mouse elbow, repetitive use injuries, eye fatigue, migraines, obesity, sleep disturbances, drowsy driving, sleep deprivation, backaches, eating irregularities, and poor personal hygiene.

### eThrombosis (Deep Vein Thrombosis)

In 2003, Wired magazine ran a report on the risk of deep vein thrombosis (<http://www.wired.com/medtech/health/news/2003/02/57580>) after a 32-year old man who had been at his computer for hours suffered a "massive blood clot that caused him to black out." Researchers in New Zealand termed the phrase eThrombosis to describe the condition and warned users to stand up, move around, and to limit long amounts of immobility while using the computer.

## **Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) (Mouse Elbow and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome)**

According to Malachy J. Foley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, "computer use is the principal cause of musculoskeletal disorder (<http://analytics.ncsu.edu/sesug/2004/SY04-Foley.pdf>)" (MSD). MSD is a group of medical conditions that consist of an injury to the muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, nerves, spinal discs, cartilage, blood vessels or related soft tissue that is caused or aggravated by physical tasks." In examining the problem, Foley contacted the North Carolina Department of Labor who claims that "MSD is 'the single highest cause of workplace illnesses and injuries and worker's compensation claims in North Carolina.'" Foley says "MSD is a serious and prevalent threat to a computer [users] health."

## **Repetitive strain injury (RSI)**

Also known as repetitive stress injury, repetitive motion injuries, repetitive motion disorder (RMD), cumulative trauma disorder (CT), occupational overuse syndrome. Repetitive strain injuries affect the musculoskeletal and nervous system and are generally caused by repetitive tasks, forceful exertions, vibrations, mechanical compression (pressing against hard surfaces), or sustained or awkward positions.

## **Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) (Eye fatigue)**

Research presented by the American Optometric Association indicates that "more than seventy percent of users that work on a computer monitor (which is over 140 million) experience computer vision syndrome (CVS) or eye fatigue (<http://www.professionalvision.com/whats-new/New-News-Item,337360>). Prolonged computer use can result in eye strain and impact eyesight in kids as well as adults. Anyone that sits more than 2 hours on a daily basis on the computer is at risk of some degree of computer related eye fatigue."

## **Obesity**

There is a link between media use and obesity in technology users. Generally, the more hours spent in front of a screen, the greater the risk of obesity. Researchers find the health effects are similar, as electronic game playing is often a sedentary activity.

## **Sleep Deprivation and Drowsy Driving**

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine says the body's need for sleep is so strong that the brain will attempt to make you sleep no matter what you are doing at the time." Lack of sleep contributes to "sleep debt," which accumulates over time. The effects of drowsiness are similar in nature to alcohol use. "Drowsiness can impair your ability to drive at a rate that is higher than the legal alcohol limit," according to the organizations wellness booklet. Excessive sleepiness impacts focus and attention. "One study showed drivers awake for 15 or more hours had a four times the risk of having a drowsy driving crash. If a driver had been awake for 20 or more hours, the risk of crashing increases by 30 times."

The "Drowsy Driving Act of 2005" is also known as "Rob's Law" (see drowsy driving law summary) (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/transportation/summaries-of-current-drowsy-driving-laws.aspx>) in memory of Major Robert M. Raneri, US Army Reserve, who was killed June 26, 2002 by a "drowsy driver". Major Raneri was killed by a 19 year old male who confessed to police that he had been out all night playing video games. The death was treated as a misdemeanor because no drugs or alcohol was involved. He was sentenced to five years' probation and loss of license for ten years. (Note: National Drowsy Driving Awareness week occurs each November in the United States.)

## Neurological Brain Development Concerns

Scientists working at Tohoku University in Japan have discovered that computer games only stimulate those parts of the brain that are devoted to vision and movement (<http://www.zdnet.co.uk/news/networking/2001/08/20/scientists-link-computer-games-to-brain-damage-2093389/>), and do not aid the development of other important areas of the brain.

## Photosensitive epileptic seizures (PSE)

A rare form of epilepsy known as photosensitive epileptic seizures (PSE) is triggered by visual stimuli that form patterns in time or space, such as flashing lights, bold, regular patterns, or regular moving patterns. A very small percentage of technology users may be sensitive to a variety of games or technologies that display rapidly flashing graphics.

## Ergonomic Related Health Issues

View the latest research (<http://www.workriteergo.com/ergonomics/articles.asp>) on computer use and the need for efficient use of technology

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Physiotherapist
- Mental Health Counselor

Tags: addiction (</component/tags/tag/50-addiction.html>), internet addiction (</component/tags/tag/89-internet-addiction.html>), video games (</component/tags/tag/173-video-games.html>), device (</component/tags/tag/414-device.html>), sleep (</component/tags/tag/493-sleep.html>), ethrombosis (</component/tags/tag/502-ethrombosis.html>), carpal tunnel (</component/tags/tag/503-carpal-tunnel.html>), mouse elbow (</component/tags/tag/504-mouse-elbow.html>), repetitive use (</component/tags/tag/505-repetitive-use.html>), eye fatigue (</component/tags/tag/506-eye-fatigue.html>), migraines (</component/tags/tag/507-migraines.html>), obesity (</component/tags/tag/508-obesity.html>), drowsy driving (</component/tags/tag/509-drowsy-driving.html>), sleep deprivation (</component/tags/tag/510-sleep-deprivation.html>), backaches (</component/tags/tag/511-backaches.html>), eating irregularities (</component/tags/tag/512-eating-irregularities.html>), poor hygiene (</component/tags/tag/513-poor-hygiene.html>)

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