

INTERNET ADDICTION IN ADOLESCENTS

Teens go through a period of intense growth, change, and development during their adolescence, which is never without some distress. Teens are faced with forging their own identities and making connections in a tough social world. The pressures of school are higher than ever. Some teens also grapple with difficult family situations, such as divorce.

Faced with these pressures, some teens turn to the Internet to cope. The Internet provides a world of infinite information and entertainment right at the user's fingertips, from games to social websites to sexually explicit content. All of these factors can lure in teens who are looking for acceptance or escape, or who are trying to forge their own identity. In some cases, the gratification provided by Internet use can become addictive. Teens who already have depression or anxiety are at an especially high risk.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Teens with Internet addiction may display one or more of the following:

- Excessive Internet usage, often for hours every day
- Preoccupation with the Internet when not using it
- A sudden drop in grades
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Withdrawing from normal hobbies and extracurricular activities
- Lying about Internet use
- Changes in sleep and eating schedules
- Physical side effects of Internet usage, such as eye strain and headaches

Sometimes, it can be hard to directly link Internet usage to a particular symptom. For example, most teens use the Internet on a daily basis, and sudden changes in interests and behavior can be normal in teens. This can make it easy for parents to rationalize. However, if you are concerned about your child's Internet usage, it's a good idea to seek a professional assessment.

TREATMENT

Internet addiction in adolescents can be particularly serious because it can interfere with the essential emotional, intellectual, and social developments that occur during adolescence. At the same time, parents of adolescents have the opportunity to take a more active role in the treatment of Internet addiction, providing a high level of support. The motivation to heal can only come from the addict, but parents can help by giving their kids access to:

- Boundaries and expectations at home
- Rewards for positive behavior at home
- Group therapy
- Individual therapy
- Family therapy
- In-patient treatment
- Wilderness therapy

Wilderness therapy has been shown to be a particularly effective method for treating Internet addiction in adolescents. At Pacific Quest, we have seen great success treating Internet addiction using our Sustainable Growth™ model, which focuses on the mind-body connection, the importance of nature, and the individual's place within the community, as well as the essential aspects of clinical care.

If you'd like to learn more about Internet addiction and how Pacific Quest's Wilderness Therapy Program can help, please download [A Parent's Guide to Internet Addiction in Teens and Young Adults](#) or contact us at 808-937-5806 today.

INTERNET ADDICTION IN YOUNG ADULTS

Young adulthood is a period of intense transition. Faced with an ever-growing amount of freedom and responsibility, many young adults find themselves struggling with coping and identity issues. When young people suffer from stress, depression, social anxiety, or a simple lack of coping skills, they may turn to many forms of relief for the intense emotions they face, such as overusing the Internet.

Internet addiction often starts out when the addict begins using the Internet to unwind, a pleasurable action which releases dopamine in the brain. As this reward pathway becomes more established, a person can become reliant on Internet use. Internet addiction can manifest in addiction to social networking, information, role-playing games (RPGs), gambling, cybersex, or other activities available on the Internet.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Since Internet usage is such an essential part of the social and academic lives of young adults, it can be hard to distinguish between normal use and use that's out of control. Young adults with Internet addiction often display:

- A preoccupation with online activities
- Withdrawal from normal social and extracurricular activities
- A drop in grades or work performance
- Feeling upset, irritable, or guilty when away from the computer
- Lying about usage
- Marathon Internet sessions
- Spending excessive money on online activities like RPGs
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in exercise habits
- Changes in sleep schedule
- Back pain
- Wrist pain
- Headaches
- Eye strain

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Depending on the severity of the issue and the patient's needs and preferences, a number of treatment methods can be used:

- Lifestyle changes. It is often difficult for people suffering from a major psychological issue to make lifestyle changes on their own. However, a healthy diet, a good sleep schedule, and regular exercise can go a long way towards facilitating recovery. Staying active in non-Internet activities is also important.
- Individual therapy. There are several models of therapy, such as psychotherapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy. The best choice is usually up to a person's preferences, but cognitive-behavioral therapy is a popular approach for Internet addiction.
- Group therapy. Group therapy provides a safe, supportive space for a group of people suffering from similar issues.
- In-patient treatment. In-patient treatment provides a high level of support and treatment, with access to on-site doctors and the support of other patients. It is often used when out-patient methods are not effective.
- Wilderness therapy. Similar to in-patient treatment, wilderness therapy places a bigger focus on whole-body wellness and real-world accomplishments. Many people prefer wilderness therapy for the enriching environment it provides.

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