Can Too Much Screen Time Harm You?
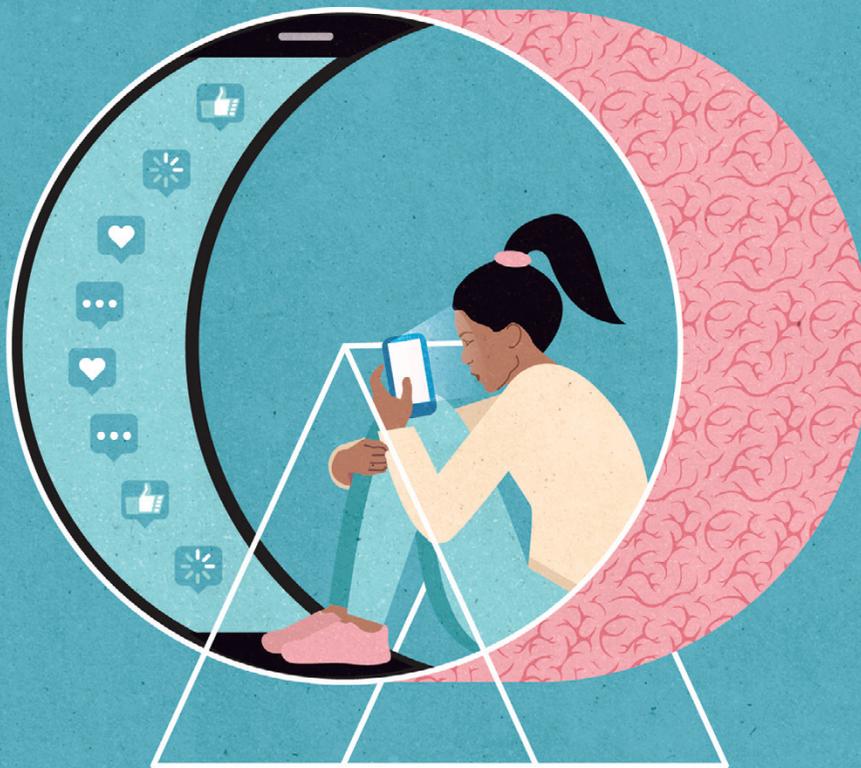
Learn how spending excessive time on electronic devices can affect your brain and body.

Phones, tablets, even watches—screens are everywhere you turn. According to Common Sense Media, teens spend an average of seven hours and 22 minutes on screens *every day*! And that doesn't include computer time for schoolwork! Studies show that too much screen time can affect your body. Adolescence is a critical time for brain development so teens may be especially at risk. While watching videos or texting with friends is fun, it's crucial to limit screen time. Here's why—and how.

Trouble Sleeping

Excessive screen time can disrupt your sleep. You may stay up later interacting with your device. Your body releases a chemical called **melatonin** at night, in response to darkness. It helps your body fall asleep and stay asleep. Bright screen lights can reduce melatonin production, keeping you awake.

Some studies link higher levels of screen time to increased symptoms of depression.

Sleep is especially important for teens. Getting too little sleep can weaken your immune system, making you more likely to get sick. It can also affect your ability to concentrate, learn, and remember. While you sleep, your brain stores what it's learned during the day. This makes it possible to recall information come test time.

Mood Changes

Too much scrolling and texting may affect your emotional health. Scientists are still studying the link between screen time and mood. But some studies link higher levels of screen time to increased symptoms of depression. Many other factors also play a role in depression. Other studies have shown that excessive screen time may lead some teens to neglect responsibilities, use screens to deal with stress, and feel anxious without a device.

Altering Your Brain

Too much screen time may cause physical changes to your brain. The **cortex** is the outer layer of the brain that processes information. During adolescence, the cortex undergoes critical development. Screen time may affect its growth. A study called Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) revealed that some kids who use screens more than seven hours a day had a thinner cortex than those who used screens less. Future studies hope to show how this will affect kids' brains over time.

Tune Out

Your brain goes through major changes during your teens. Everything you experience during this time can affect your brain development. It's essential to challenge your brain by trying new things—like sports, music, and cooking—so it can help you process information and solve problems in the future. Screens may always be a part of your life—but they don't have to be the *main part*.

Tips for "Turning Off"

● ● ●

1
Use an app to track your screen time. Set limits.

2
Turn off all screens 30 to 60 minutes before bed. You'll fall asleep more easily and feel better-rested in the morning.

3
Schedule time to do things without phones or other screens: Go outside, try a new hobby, hang out with friends.

4
Exercise—you'll feel a natural boost of your brain's feel-good chemicals.

5
Keep a journal. Does screen time make you feel anxious or stressed? Talk to your parents, a school counselor, or your doctor for help.