

tech talk



Most of us are packing plenty of tech, from laptops and BlackBerrys to cellphones and Wi-Fi-enabled iPods. They keep us connected to friends and family and allow us to work from virtually anywhere. But is staying connected doing more harm than good? *glow* explores how technology is having an impact on our well-being. **BY BRIONY SMITH** ● ILLUSTRATION BY MATTE STEPHENS

Seven out of 10 Canadians say that their wireless devices are always with them, says Donna Hall, a senior director for Solutions Research Group in Toronto. And when they're not, 59 percent suffer from "disconnect anxiety" – feelings of disorientation and nervousness experienced

digital do #1

Learning to manage your digital world is key to good health. Start small. For instance, leave your BlackBerry in your car when you meet friends for dinner or in your locker when you're working out.

when a person is deprived of Internet or wireless access for a period of time. The result? Too much time spent on Facebook, one eye on the road and the other reading a text message, and frustrated children who are watching their parents pay more attention to incoming emails than their soccer game.

Our gadgets are ever-present: while commuting, in restaurants and, yes, even at the gym. Sender Deutsch, director of SHAPE Health and Wellness Centre in Toronto, says that women are using their mobile devices during workouts. "There's no chance for them to tune out to do something for themselves," says Deutsch.

Tech talk is even becoming common in relationship therapy. "Suddenly, outside demands and distractions are slipping into every facet of our day," says Rebecca Rosenblat, a psychotherapist and relationship therapist in Toronto. "Technology interrupts us in bed, at the dinner table, in the living room and in the middle

of serious conversations." It's not uncommon for partners, children and friends to complain when they feel like they have to compete for your time and attention. "It's very distracting to be repeatedly interrupted by a gadget that takes priority over an actual person," she says.

And those are just the psychological implications. Being constantly connected can also affect your body. Take text messaging at the gym. Put simply, it interferes with your workout. "Not focusing on your workout can prevent you from reaching enough intensity to cause physiological changes to your body," says Deutsch.

Then there's eye strain from staring at increasingly smaller screens, sore shoulders from too much mouse use and even "BlackBerry thumb" tendonitis – all conditions that have been cropping up in physiotherapy practices, says Linda McLean, an associate professor at the Queen's University School of Rehabilitation Therapy in Kingston, Ont., and chair of the women's health division of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association.

We're not saying that you need to chuck that laptop or delete your Facebook account to stay sane and healthy; like anything in life, gadgetry is all about moderation. Keep that smartphone on hand – just not *in* your hands all the time. That way, you can still keep up but stay connected to the ones who matter most: your family and friends, the best network of all. **E**

digital do #3

Do you lug your laptop around in an oversized bag? Bring it when you really need it, but carry it across your shoulder, messenger-style, to reduce back and neck strain.

digital do #2

Set specific times to check emails after hours or on holidays. "Women often respond to others' communication strategies instead of designing their own," says Dana Marcon, a life coach based in Halifax. Bosses and co-workers often set the pace by assuming that it's OK to contact you after hours and expect a response, she says, so it's important to establish a policy that works for you – whether it's answering emails once in the morning and once at the end of the workday or not responding to work communiqués on weekends.

