

## Deciphering Medical Studies

Nearly every day we read or hear about the results of new medical studies. The amount of information is overwhelming and coverage varies among news outlets. Some research is groundbreaking, while other studies add to many years of scientific inquiry. A few, such as the Framingham Heart Study (U.S.), encompass several generations of participants.



**Medical research** evaluates health and illness. Scientists explore the causes of disease or symptoms; test if treatments help with a condition; and learn how certain behaviours affect one's health.

**The goal is to help health care providers** find new and better ways to understand, detect, control and treat illness, and to help patients determine their own personal health risks, especially when they are diagnosed with or are at risk for a medical disorder.

**When you read or hear about medical studies,** consider these key factors:

- How many people participated and who were they (gender, occupation, health status)?
- Was it a randomized controlled clinical trial? (Participants are randomly assigned to a treatment group or a control group. COVID-19 vaccine trials are an example.)
- Where was the research done and who paid for it?
- For new treatments being tested, were there side effects?



**A good way to explore a study is to read its abstract** — a summary that can help you quickly learn the important aspects of the data. Abstracts generally include the study's purpose, size, methods used, participants, and a summary of results.

**To access clinical abstracts online,** start with PubMed (U.S. National Library of Medicine), which includes more than 18 million citations from a wide variety of science and medical journals, at [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).



### CSI notes

## Dependent Coverage

Another school year will soon be complete. It's time to review your dependents' eligibility.

The Canada Insurance Plan defines an eligible dependent as:

- a natural, adopted, or step-child who is not married,
- entirely dependent on you for maintenance and support,
- under age 21 (or age 25 if attending accredited university full-time),
- not employed full-time, and
- not eligible for coverage as an employee under this or any other Group Benefit Plan.

A step-child must be living with you to be eligible.

A child that is physically or mentally incapable of self-support may be covered past age 21 (or age 25) with approval from Manulife. Contact the CSI insurance office for more information.

**Members should review their dependents' status each year.** You may update this information in the Employee Benefits Portal during the open enrolment period (June-July) or you may contact **Laura Landstra** at [llandstra@csionline.org](mailto:llandstra@csionline.org) or **877.274.3230, ext. 230**, at any time throughout the year.

**If your over-age dependent is no longer a full-time student,** coverage terminates according to the date full-time studies cease. They may consider purchasing Manulife's Individual Health Coverage called COVERME. For information, call **877.COVER-ME (1.877.268.3763)** or visit Manulife's website at [www.coverme.com](http://www.coverme.com).

“You will never win if you never begin.” — Helen Rowland

# Digital Addiction

By Eric Endlich, PhD

**Technology addiction is defined as the frequent and obsessive use of technology resulting in negative consequences for the user.** While experts still debate whether excessive digital use is a true addiction, unchecked use of electronic devices can cause many symptoms, including:

- Impaired focus and increased distraction and less attention to basic needs, such as sleep, exercise or a healthy diet.
- Caring more about virtual relationships than actual ones.
- Compulsive gaming, shopping, gambling or stock trading.
- FOMO (fear of missing out) on the latest trending topics.
- Withdrawal symptoms (e.g., anxiety, restlessness) when offline.
- Deteriorating performance at school or work.
- Worsening communication and recognition of facial or nonverbal cues.
- Impulsivity or problems regulating emotions.
- Diminished time spent on other activities.
- Feeling isolated, lonely or stressed.
- Using the internet to escape from negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression).
- Phubbing (snubbing) others by using a smartphone during social occasions, such as meals.
- Decreased attention to basic needs, such as sleep, exercise or a healthy diet.



**If these symptoms seem familiar to you, consider how your internet and smart device use is affecting you.** Smartphones can be particularly tricky because of their easy accessibility; here are strategies to reduce the undesirable effects:

- **Try a digital detox:** Reduce or eliminate use of electronics for a specified period of time.
- **Delete social media apps** from your phone so you can only access them on your computer.
- **Leave your device** outside the bedroom at bedtime.
- **Curtail checking habits** by only using devices at designated, limited time slots.
- **Use cognitive behavioural therapy** to address resistant internet habits.
- **Designate digital-free times** and areas, such as the dinner table and while driving.
- **Monitor your digital use** by keeping a log of time spent online for non-essential activities.
- **Use offline time** for enjoyable or productive activities. Rekindle an old interest, go outside or play with children or pets.
- **Recognize what triggers your online use.** If it's negative feelings, is there a better way to manage them, such as relaxation techniques or offline activities?



## Balancing Act: Work and Family

**We've all heard it's important to have a work-life balance.** But figuring out how to achieve it isn't always easy.

**Tips for bringing your work and family into more harmony:**

- **Commit to a healthy lifestyle.** A healthy diet, daily physical activity, adequate sleep and finding activities you can share with a partner, family or friends are essential to a balanced life.
- **Set limits for working from home.** Whether you telecommute or spend time occasionally working from home, set up a dedicated office space and make it clear to family and friends when you are at work. But also have a routine — such as shutting down your computer or going for a walk — which signals your workday has ended and you're ready for family time.
- **Develop a support system.** Enlist family members and trusted friends to help with childcare or pet care if you have to work late. Likewise, build relationships with coworkers who can cover for you (and vice versa) if a family matter arises.



### What About Kids?

**Watch out for these red flags for digital addiction in children:**

- Declining grades.
- Poor concentration and drowsiness during school.
- Extensive late-night device use.
- Diminished interest in friends or activities.
- Substantial bills for online activities.
- Withdrawal symptoms (pacing, irritability).

Seek professional help if your child persistently resists efforts to manage device usage.

## Watch Out for Brushing

**Brushing** is an illegal scam in which people receive unsolicited items from a third-party seller (on an e-commerce site) who then posts false customer reviews to boost sales. Unsolicited packages can have anything from a Bluetooth speaker to a humidifier. The scammer uses your personal information to order the product. The seller can then pose as you and post a positive review of their product to boost their ratings on the e-commerce site where it was sold.

If you receive a package that you did not order, contact the e-tailer that hosts the seller. It means the scammer likely has your name, shipping address and possibly other information. Use a credit-monitoring service and change your password for the e-commerce site. To learn more, search for **Office of Consumer Affairs** at [ic.gc.ca](http://ic.gc.ca).

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, AFC



## TIP of the MONTH

### Mediterranean Diet



May is International Mediterranean Diet Month.

You can adopt this traditional eating style in Mediterranean countries by **including** more vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, fish, olive oil and fresh herbs in your diet, while **reducing** highly processed foods, sweets and red meat. This eating plan has been linked with a lower risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and some types of cancer, and is filled with a colourful variety of delicious dishes. No deprivation — just enjoyment.

# Rethink Kid Food

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



**Check any restaurant children's menu** and the selection will look much the same: burgers, pizza and chicken fingers. While familiar and delicious, these foods offer little nutritional value. They provide more salt and fat than children require, and rarely contain enough fibre or vegetables.

**Of course, it's fine for children to eat these fun foods on occasion.**

Unfortunately, these foods have become the norm. Studies show that among average children in Canada: (1) ultra-processed foods comprise 57% of calories and (2) a third of a child's daily food intake comes from products prepared outside their home (e.g., restaurants).

**This is concerning because diets high in ultra-processed foods** are linked with an increased risk of conditions, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers.

**How can parents and caregivers help children make better choices?** Start by making it a priority, eating meals together and being a good role model. Kids are often interested in what's on an adult's plate, so let them try it. If they watch you eat vegetables regularly, they are likely to follow suit.

**Involve kids with food in pleasant, fun and exciting ways:** Go to a farmer's market, visit a pick-your-own farm, grocery shop together, watch a cooking show and try new recipes. Children will learn about variety and be more likely to try new things. And, give your children some control: Offer meals family style on the table and let kids help themselves (instead of plating meals for them). You may be surprised to see which foods they choose.

**Remember that *kid food* is merely a marketing term.** Children can and **should** eat a variety of nutritious foods daily, including vegetables, fruit, fish, dairy, eggs, poultry, beans, nuts and whole grains. Don't make any food off limits, but offer a variety of nutritious foods every day.



## Mediterranean White Bean Salad

EASY recipe

2 cans (540ml or 15-oz.) unsalted white beans, drained and rinsed  
1 large tomato, diced  
1 English cucumber diced  
1 red pepper, seeded and diced  
2 green onions, minced

1 cup fresh chopped parsley  
¼ cup fresh chopped mint  
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil  
1 lemon, zest and juice  
2 tsp za'atar spice blend  
¼ tsp salt



In a large bowl, mix beans, tomato, cucumber, pepper, green onions, parsley and mint. In a small bowl, stir together oil, lemon zest, lemon juice, za'atar and salt. **Pour** dressing over salad and toss to coat. **Add** salt to taste. **Optional:** Serve topped with crumbled feta cheese and crispy pita chips.

**Makes 6 servings. Per serving:** 210 calories | 11g protein | 6g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 4g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 38g carbohydrate | 3g sugar | 11g fibre | 145mg sodium

## Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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We honor God by taking care of our physical and emotional health. CSI encourages each participant to choose a healthy life style and to be equipped to make informed medical decisions. This newsletter is being provided as a service to our participants and their schools.

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## EXPERT advice — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

### Q: When to go to the ER?

**A:** You need to go to the emergency room for health conditions that risk death or permanent disability. Call 911 for emergencies, such as choking, difficulty breathing, chest pain, head or spine injuries, electric shock or severe burns. Emergency room treatment is also warranted for passing out, severe or unusual headache, sudden slurred speech or weakness on one side, poisoning, overdose, severe allergic reactions, suicidal thoughts, seizures, deep wounds, heavy bleeding, broken bones or other emergency conditions.

**Go to an urgent care centre** if your problem is not life threatening, but you cannot see your health care provider soon enough. Common illnesses and minor injuries can be treated at urgent care clinics.

**See your provider** whenever possible for non-emergency health conditions. You will generally get the best continuity of care from providers who know you and have access to your medical records.



## Choose the Right Helmet

**Bicycle helmets have come a long way** in protecting your head against severe head injury, including the 2007 introduction of the Multi-directional Impact Protection System (MIPS), for helmets. The MIPS is a thin liner inside the helmet that allows the outer shell to slide a few millimeters across the skull on impact. This reduces the rotational force and energy transferred to the head, protecting further against concussions.

### When choosing the correct helmet, here are some guidelines:

**Check the labels.** Make sure it has a certification label from the Canadian Standards Association (CAN/CSA Cycling Helmets), meaning that it was tested for safety, and meets the federal safety standard. (The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is also an accepted standard for helmet certification in Canada.) You can also check for labels that state the helmet is EN, ASTM or Snell B90/B95 certified. **Note:** MIPS adds an extra level of protection.

**Get the right fit.** Helmets should be snug but not too tight. It should sit level on your head and no more than an inch above your eyebrows. Test the fit by pushing the helmet side to side and front to back and give it a twist. The helmet should only move a little. Adjust straps or knob to loosen or tighten.

**Take proper care of your helmet.** Store it away from direct sunlight and in a room that doesn't get too hot or cold. Clean your helmet by wiping it with a cloth. You can use warm water and a mild soap but never soak your helmet.

**Replace your helmet.** Helmets should be replaced after one impact — even if you don't see any damage. Also replace your helmet if it has any cracks, deterioration or any other damage. **Note:** The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends replacing your helmet five to ten years after you buy it, based on amount of use and condition.

**Working from home?** Use these tips to avoid distractions. Temporarily turn off phone and email alerts when you need to concentrate. Although these notifications may be brief, a Florida State University study found they prompt mind-wandering. Taking regular breaks may seem like a distraction, but research shows you'll likely be more focused afterwards. Stop checking social media throughout your workday. Avoid the temptation by promising yourself you'll only visit social media once your work is finished.

