TOPIC: Technology

Activity #2

Digital detoxes are a solution looking for a problem

January 17, 2019

1 With New Year's resolutions in full swing, many people may have chosen to cut down on their tech use or even give it up altogether. The growing popularity of such "digital detoxes" is encouraged by the number of negative findings about the effects of technology use, alongside claims that such action can help reduce stress and help people become more "present" and compassionate.

2 But frequent use of technology and social media isn't a problem in itself. Despite reported claims, there's currently little scientific evidence that digital detoxes have any benefits. In fact, giving up your devices completely could have its own unintended negative consequences.

3 One of the reasons that digital detoxes seem good for us is the misconception that technology is inherently harmful. There are numerous studies that link excessive technology use with poorer sleep, increased depressive symptoms, and higher levels of anxiety.

4 But while studies ask participants questions about how much they use technology and how depressed or anxious they are, they are unable to explain the direction of any effect. Essentially, we cannot tell if they use social media because they are depressed, or they are depressed because they use social media. And, of course, many other factors might explain why a person feels depressed or anxious.

5 Most studies also rely on self-reported estimates of technology use, which may get inaccurate information. Interestingly, when time in front of a screen is measured automatically by an application or device, depression and anxiety aren't associated with total smartphone usage.

6 The RCPCH, the UK body representing doctors who specialize in children, recently argued that screen time is not "toxic" to health and that the evidence for harm is overstated. But negative findings continue to have a greater influence on public opinion as they appear more frequently in the popular press. This can sometimes lead to a vicious cycle where research responds directly to "hoax" media claims. The results then generate even more alarming headlines.

7 Meanwhile, there's little evidence that digital detoxes actually have any benefit. The majority of what exists is based on anecdotes rather than scientific studies. Some arguments might seem sensible, such as that giving up technology may encourage people to be more physically active. But again, no research has demonstrated that this is actually true.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

8 Giving up technology also means giving up the good things about it. For example, smartphones and social media help people communicate and socialize, which is known to increase happiness. So it's not surprising that some studies have found complete withdrawal from social media can have adverse consequences such as lower satisfaction, boredom, feelings of social pressure, and fear.

9 Age-old concerns People have always been concerned about almost every mass-adopted technology invented, but the idea that screen-based technologies are harming society continues to be a source of considerable debate surrounded by questionable evidence and media excitement. As more research is completed, it's important that findings are presented carefully to prevent further misinterpretation.

10 When it comes to digital detoxes, there is unlikely to be anything seriously wrong with stepping away from technology for the majority of people. There's little evidence to suggest that technology is inherently bad, it might be that digital detoxes have no problem to solve in the first place.

11 While the evidence we do have is patchy from decades of bad practice, the truth is slowly emerging with improved methods, suggesting that technology use is not harmful in itself. Adapted from: The Conversation by David A. Ellis, Brittany I. Davidson.

1.- Look at the questions below and then read the text to find correct answers.

1. How accurate is the link between technology use and depression?

_____

_____

2. What is the connection between pessimistic findings on technology use and public opinion?

_____

_____

3. How can smartphones and social media increase happiness'?

_____

_____

4. What are some of the consequences of complete withdrawal from social media?

_____

_____

5. What is the author's conclusion about the effect of technology use?

_____

_____

LIVEWORKSHEETS