

The Surprising Truth about How the Internet Can Affect Your Brain

You know the Internet has changed the way you do things, but did you know that it can change your brain? According to the theory of neuroplasticity, your activities and experiences modify your brain structure over time. You may think differently as the result of googling and gaming.

A recent study by 5 major universities around the world provides one of the most comprehensive looks at these effects. As you might expect, they found some advantages and disadvantages to being connected 24/7.

While you're enjoying your devices, **learn how to protect your mental and emotional health.** Take a look at what science has to say about the online world and your brain.



Your Attention Span:

The Internet encourages multitasking, divides your attention, and bombards you with distractions. You might have to take countermeasures to build back your concentration.

These strategies will help you focus:

1. **Live mindfully.** Spend each day focusing on the present moment. Develop a regular meditation practice. Be content with what you have and act kindly toward yourself and others.
2. **Do one thing.** Give your full attention to a single task at a time. **Many studies show that multitasking causes stress and lowers performance.**
3. **Close some media.** Limit multitasking online too. Avoid second screening, where you work on your phone or tablet while you're watching TV.

Your Memory:

Students spend less time memorizing state capitals now that most knowledge is easily available. However, rote learning has some benefits you may want to preserve.



Try these ideas to build your memory skills:

1. **Stimulate learning.** It's easier to make connections when you're familiar with the facts. Your long-term memory helps you to build on what you already know.
2. **Stay safe.** Could you find your way to a gas station without GPS or do simple math without your phone? You're more secure if you can function offline too.
3. **Think critically.** How do you know if what you're reading on the Internet is reliable? **Developing your own expertise will help you to distinguish between fact and fiction.**
4. **Create memories.** You may be relieved to know that you're unlikely to forget your wedding or your child's first words. Digital activities appear to have little effect on capturing moments that resonate emotionally.

Your Social Life:

Researchers are particularly concerned about younger generations who have grown up with the Internet and may be more vulnerable to social pressures. Social media and other activities can help us or hold us back.

Keep these tips in mind:

1. **Hang out offline.** Spend time with family and friends. Eat dinner together as a family as often as possible. Make weekly dates for movie nights and biking trips.



2. **Resist comparisons. Try to be authentic and helpful when you're posting online.** You'll avoid much of the stress that comes from trying to chase popularity or impress others.
3. **Reach out.** While you often hear about the potential dangers, the Internet is also a great way to widen your circle. Join a Meetup Group or participate in a forum about a subject you love.

More Tips:

1. **Set a curfew.** Is blue light interfering with your sleep? Turn off all devices at least 2 hours before bed so you'll be ready to rest.

2. **Read more.** Compared to skimming articles online, reading books can help you increase your attention span and your memory. You may even become more popular if you have interesting things to talk about.
3. **Delay gratification.** Has the Internet conditioned you to expect immediate results? Slow down and appreciate the value of working for what you want.

Remember that the Internet is only about 30 years old, so this research is still preliminary. Still, **you can help make technology work for you by adopting healthy habits.** Limit multitasking, engage in face-to-face communications, and disconnect for at least an hour each day.

Talking about issues regarding your brain, I have written an inspiring story about the recovery journey I have had to travel since being almost killed in a serious car crash where I sustained an extremely severe, traumatic brain injury. You can read about this by going to the home page of my web site <http://davidwpaton.com>.