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Digital devices and your health

A 2014 Nielsen Company report found that American adults spend on average 10 hours, 39 minutes of screen time a day. That's roughly two-thirds of a day's waking hours. All that time engaged in one activity is bound to affect health in some way or another.

Vision.

Staring at a screen for hour after hour can cause computer vision syndrome, also called digital eyestrain. You're probably familiar with the problems: eyestrain, dry eyes, headaches, blurred vision, and neck and shoulder pain. The American Optometric Association recommends the 20/20/20 rule to help prevent these symptoms: Take a 20-second break every 20 minutes and look at something 20 feet away. If your symptoms persist, talk to your eye doctor.

Sleep.

The blue light emitted by electronic screens can make it hard to fall asleep at night. The National Sleep Foundation explains that using tablets, smartphones, laptops or other electronic devices before bedtime may disrupt your body's internal clock. The artificial light makes you more alert when you should be getting sleepy. Consider putting yourself on a digital curfew. Turn off electronic devices an hour or two before going to sleep. Instead, read a printed book under lamplight or use an e-reader with an E-Ink screen, which does not emit blue light.

Sedentary habits.

Unless you're at the gym or have a standing desk, when you're staring at a screen, you're sitting down. Sitting for hours at a time is bad for your health, even if you're otherwise healthy. Sedentary habits raise the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity. The American College of Sports Medicine has singled out a sedentary lifestyle as a disease risk factor, even in people who get plenty of exercise. Regular exercise does not cancel out the ill effects of prolonged sitting. Try to limit sedentary time if possible. Stand up and stretch or walk for a few minutes every hour when you're sitting for long periods.

QuickTakes



Distraction dangers behind the wheel

Over the past decade, portable electronic devices have changed how and how often we access, use and share information. The Pew Research Center reports that more than three-quarters of Americans now own a smartphone. Your device connects you to the world in many ways. It's a personal secretary, concierge and trusty companion all in one.

We like to think our digital devices help us be better multitaskers. Researchers at the University of Michigan found that multitasking is counterproductive. Here's why:

- It takes a fraction of a second for your brain to switch from one task to another.
- The constant toggling tires your brain.
- Multitasking could reduce efficiency and productivity by as much as 40 percent.

Texting or talking on your mobile phone while driving can be a deadly distraction. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that distracted driving contributes to 18 percent of all crashes.

Remember:

- You cannot drive safely unless driving has your full attention.
- Ignore your digital device if you're behind the wheel.
- Tell people that you won't answer texts and calls while you're driving.

This month's newsletter looks at more ways digital devices can impact health.

A powerful tool.

Let's not forget the positive health aspects of digital devices. Information is a powerful tool when making healthy lifestyle choices. Whether you're looking up the calorie count for a slice of pumpkin pie, checking the weather report before a day hike or verifying the balance in your HSA, ready access to information is invaluable. Accessing good information will help you make good, healthy choices.

Sources:

Pew Research Center, Fact-tank, Record shares of Americans now own smartphones, have home broadband. 2017

American Psychological Association, Multitasking: Switching costs. 2006

American Optometric Association, Computer vision syndrome. 2017

National Sleep Foundation, Why electronics may stimulate you before bed. 2017

American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), reducing sedentary behaviors. 2017

Maple-glazed brussels sprouts with crispy shallots Serves 8 - 10

Move over, classic green bean casserole. Too many calories. Too high in fat and sodium. This tasty side dish is destined to become a fixture on your Thanksgiving table for years to come.

INGREDIENTS

2½ pounds brussels sprouts
 2½ tablespoons olive oil
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 8 large shallots, peeled and sliced (not too thin)
 1 teaspoon fresh or ¼ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
 1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
 1 teaspoon cider vinegar

DIRECTIONS

1. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Trim stems on brussels sprouts. Pull off any yellowed leaves. Slice the sprouts in half lengthwise and place on the baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss to blend. Spread the sprouts out into a single layer.
2. Line an 8-inch baking dish with parchment paper. Place sliced shallots in the dish. Add the remaining 1½ tablespoons olive oil and the thyme. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Stir to blend.
3. Preheat oven to 400°F. Roast the brussels sprouts until they are browned in spots and tender, about 18 minutes, stirring halfway through. At the same time, oven-fry the shallots, stirring once or twice, until browned and crisp, about 15 minutes. Keep an eye on them to make sure they don't burn.
4. Combine maple syrup and vinegar. Drizzle over the brussels sprouts. Return the pan to the hot oven for 2 or 3 minutes to glaze.
5. Transfer the glazed brussels sprouts to a serving dish. Spoon the crispy shallots on top. Serve.



NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

115 Calories
 4 g Fat
 0.6 g Saturated fat
 5 g Protein
 9 g Carbohydrates
 5 g Fiber
 30 mg Sodium