

Is technology overwhelming you? Do you rely on computers, voice mail, cell phones, Web sites, faxes and e-mail—and feel overstimulated, panicky or stressed-out about being perpetually “plugged in”?

The term technostress was coined in 1984 by psychologist Craig Brod, PhD, in his book, *Technostress: The Human Cost of the Computer Revolution*. Larry Rosen, PhD, psychologist and coauthor of *TechnoStress: Coping With Technology @Work @Home @Play*, describes how this type of stress accumulates: “Because technology lets us do so much, today people take on too much and end up feeling overwhelmed and never ‘finished.’ . . . [They] never feel true downtime any more.”

Terrie Heinrich Rizzo, MAS, program director of health and fitness education programs for Stanford University’s Health Improvement Program in Palo Alto, California, has studied technostress. She notes that technology has dramatically changed our lives in specific ways; it has:

- increased the availability of information and the speed of acquiring it, producing “information fatigue syndrome”
- changed our perception of time and altered our internal clocks, thereby speeding up our mentality and giving us unrealistic expectations of ourselves
- increased the time spent in sedentary work, causing fatigue and physical stress
- encouraged more multitasking (juggling multiple thoughts and actions simultaneously), creating extra stress and anxiety

Symptoms of technostress include memory loss, diminished concentration, impatience, irritability, difficulty in relaxing or falling asleep—even headaches, stomach discomfort, backaches and more serious health problems, such as irritable bowel syndrome.

What You Can Do

Rizzo offers these strategies to help you manage technostress:

1. Give Yourself More Time for Everything. If the drive to your appointment takes 15 minutes, allow yourself a half hour. If a project is expected to take two days, plan on three. Also, learn to say “no” to things that are not high on your list of priorities.

2. Schedule Regular Times to Do Specific Tasks. Use preset times to retrieve e-mail and voice mail messages, and resist the impulse to check for these at other times. Do you really need to know what’s there right at this moment? If not, unplug.

3. Set Regular Time-Out Periods. For one or two hours, don’t plug into anything. Avoid computers, fax machines, phones and any other technological devices that habitually demand your attention.

4. Create Memory Helpers. Use lists, notes and daily planners to stay organized. You will feel more secure and relaxed if your brain doesn’t have to remember everything.

5. Take Regular Breaks. Get up, walk around, stretch, do breathing exercises or meditate. Take a short vision break from your computer at least every 30 minutes (preferably more frequently). Set a timer or use another kind of reminder to make sure you take your breaks at predetermined intervals. Drink lots of water—it’s healthy and will necessitate breaks!

6. Slow Down. Limit multitasking and consciously try to stop rushing. Breathe deeply and avoid taking on the wired rhythms of technostressed people.

7. Plan Ahead. Be prepared for glitches, crashes, freezes or other technology breakdowns. Back up documents, keep phone numbers for technical assistance handy, and have an alternate plan to adopt when the copier or answering machine breaks.

8. Resist the Urge to Acquire New Technology. Do you really need a cell phone? Or a faster Internet connection? Set limits to

help you break the techno-stress cycle.

9. Use Technology to Publicize Your Boundaries. Via e-mail and voice mail messages, communicate that you will be “out of touch” during certain time periods, to be with your family or simply to take a break.

10. Get Outdoors. The rhythms of nature will slow you down. Swinging in a hammock, reading on a park bench or relaxing under a tree will give you a different perspective on techno-urgency. Just don’t take your laptop or cell phone!

11. Exercise More. This may be one of the most important strategies you can use. Exercise reduces stress and combats the many health problems associated with the sedentary demands of our technological world. Mind-body exercise may be especially effective for helping you relax, rejuvenate—and reevaluate how you handle the technology in your life.

Taming Technostress

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