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## NEWS RELEASE



Suite 1200, 1111 Melville Street  
Vancouver BC V6E 3V6 Canada

T 604.669.7600

F 604.688.3236

[bcpartners@heretohelp.bc.ca](mailto:bcpartners@heretohelp.bc.ca)

[www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

### Balance in a wired world: New BC resource offers six tips to stay mentally healthy with technology

It's hard to imagine spending a day without using a computer or smartphone. Despite warnings of potential harm, or even technology-based addictions, technology use seems to be only increasing—at work, school, and play. Is it possible to stay mentally healthy in a wired world?

The BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, the collaborative of seven leading mental health and substance use organizations in BC behind the popular HeretoHelp.bc.ca website, look at this question in a new, free resource: *Staying Mentally Healthy with Technology*. The publication features tips and self-tests to help users look at the mental health impacts of technologies like computers, tablets, and smartphones.

"It's easy to focus on the problems created by technology," says Sarah Hamid-Balma, Director of Mental Health Promotion at Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, the BC Partners member that led the development of the resource. "We know that too much screen time impacts relationships, physical activity, sleep, and other factors of our well-being."

"We also have to look at the culture of constant connectedness. Many of us feel pressure to respond to notifications right away or keep on top of work long after we've left the office. When we feel like we have to be available at all times, it's hard to unwind and pay attention to everything else that's happening around us," says Hamid-Balma.

At the same time, we can't ignore the benefits of technology, including keeping in touch with friends and family, learning new skills, sharing our talents, getting support, and even receiving direct mental health care virtually through new e-health services.

When it comes to taking advantage of these benefits, balance is key. "Ultimately, technology is a tool. It's up to each of us to decide where it adds value and where it might be helpful to rethink our technology use," says Hamid-Balma.

Are you ready to find balance in your technology use? Here are six quick tips from the BC Partners and HeretoHelp.bc.ca to help you take control of your digital life:

1. **Set a schedule—and stick to it.** Give yourself a set period of time to check personal email, social media, or other sites. Depending on your work, you may even try limiting how many times you check your work email each day. Recent studies found that people who purposefully check email a limited number of times each day were less stressed than people who constantly checked their email—and both strategies were equally productive.
2. **Discuss your expectations with others.** It's easy to feel like we must respond to texts, emails, or other messages as soon as they come in. And the faster we do respond to messages, the faster people expect

a response in the future. It's perfectly okay to let family and friends know that you plan to stop checking messages at a certain time each evening. You can also talk about how you use technology when you're with others. You and your friends might agree to put your phones away when you're out together, for example.

3. **Fight distracting technology with technology.** If you have a hard time limiting your use or reducing distractions, check out programs, browser extensions, and apps that restrict access to specific websites, apps, or wireless and other networks for a predetermined amount of time. There are also minimalist versions of common programs like word processors and web browsers that are designed to reduce distractions and help you focus on one specific task.
4. **Take a break.** Get away from your computer and turn off your phone—even if it's only for an hour or two. You can even take a 'digital vacation' and designate one day a week to completely stay away from a particular device.
5. **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** Remember that the life people show online is not necessarily their real life. People usually share only good news and post only the best photos online—and a lot of those photos are edited and filtered to look as good as possible.
6. **Practice mindfulness.** When we use technology, we usually focus on anything other than what we're experiencing in the present moment. Mindfulness is a powerful tool to help you slow down and recognize what's going on. You can learn more about practicing mindfulness at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca/mindfulness](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/mindfulness).

For some, it can become difficult to find that healthy balance with technology use.

"If you're really struggling to find healthy balance in your technology use and you think it's starting to affect your well-being, it's a good idea to talk with a mental health professional," says Hamid-Balma.

To learn more about mental health and technology and find helpful resources from around the province, and take a self-test to see how you rate, see *Staying Mentally Healthy with Technology* at [heretohelp.bc.ca/staying-mentally-healthy-with-technology](http://heretohelp.bc.ca/staying-mentally-healthy-with-technology).

About BC Partners and HeretoHelp: Since 2004, HeretoHelp has been a trusted resource of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, a group of seven leading provincial mental health and addictions nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families better prevent and manage mental health and substance use problems. The agencies are AnxietyBC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, Centre for Addictions Research of BC (UVic), FORCE Society for Kids Mental Health, Jessie's Legacy program of Family Services of the North Shore, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. Funding is provided by BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

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Available for media interviews:

**Sarah Hamid-Balma**, CMHA BC | 604-688-3234 ext. 225 | [sarah.hamidbalma@cmha.bc.ca](mailto:sarah.hamidbalma@cmha.bc.ca)

**Matthew Johnson**, Director of Education, MediaSmarts | 224-7721 ext. 228 | [MJohnson@mediasmarts.ca](mailto:MJohnson@mediasmarts.ca)

**Benjamin Wong**, Clinical Counsellor in Problem Video Gaming, [www.MindfulDigitality.com](http://www.MindfulDigitality.com) | 778-999-3888 | [benjamin.wong.rcc@gmail.com](mailto:benjamin.wong.rcc@gmail.com)