

# Youth and leisure screen time

Summary results of a survey conducted by Montréal's public health department among 700 young people aged 13 to 17



Réseau réussite  
Montréal

## How many hours of leisure screen time is too many?

The number of hours of leisure screen time is clearly a factor to consider when examining the effects of screens on young people's lives. However, experts also caution that judgement is needed.

### There may be cause for concern if a young person:

- Frequently spends more time than expected using screens
- Is less physically active
- Sleeps less
- Changes their behaviour
- Is less socially present
- Has trouble tackling other tasks

### The right time

Differing amounts of available leisure time on weekdays, weekends, and holidays should be taken into account.

The goal is for the young person to have a positive experience and to work together to create an environment that promotes a generally healthy lifestyle.

**That said, the actual number of hours of leisure screen time should not be overlooked, especially given the effects of this mostly sedentary activity on healthy lifestyles.**

### What experts recommend

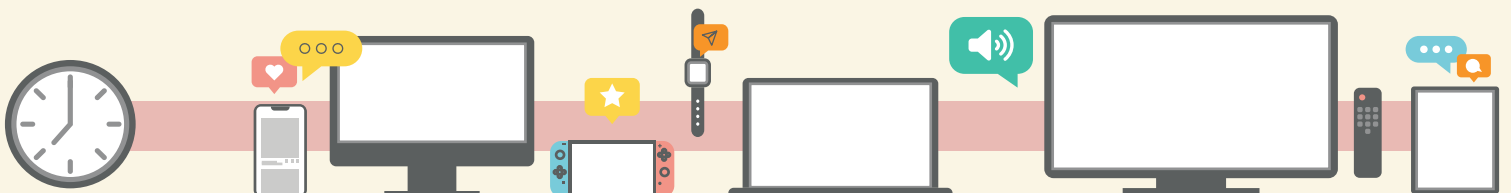
Do not exceed two hours of screen time per day.

*Youth who follow this recommendation tend to have better mental and physical health.*

### What actually happens

Recent data show that most young people, and especially teens, exceed this amount.

*Youth who engage in over four hours of screen time per day have significantly worse mental and physical health.*



## Hyperconnectivity vs. internet addiction

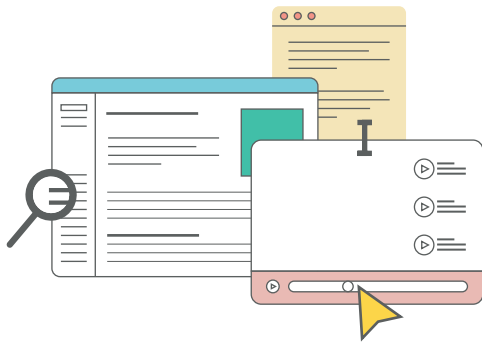


The expression “screen addiction” is often wrongly used to describe poor online habits, which are general internet uses that harm one’s well-being, relationships, studies, or other important activities, but which are not necessarily a mental health problem. Internet addiction disorder, also called problematic internet use (PIU), is an actual clinical condition associated with behavioural symptoms such as mood changes, loss of control, withdrawal, tolerance, and severe social dysfunction.



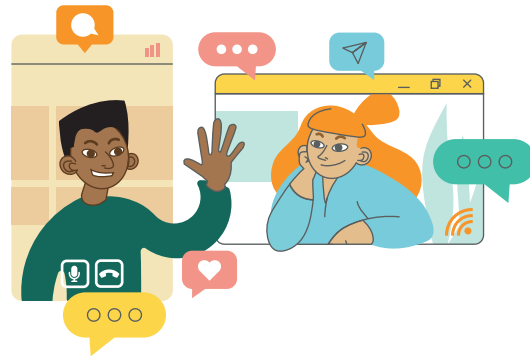
## Positive screen use during the COVID-19 pandemic

There are also positive aspects to screen use for young people. For example, during the pandemic, young people said they used screens to:



**70%**

Learn new things



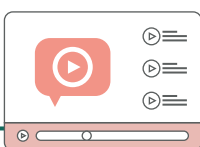
**76%**

Develop or maintain relationships with friends and family<sup>1</sup>

## Screens for education and screens for entertainment: what’s the difference?

Educational screen time is spent on activities necessary to accomplish assigned schoolwork, while leisure screen time could be spent doing other things. In general, young people most often use screens in their free time to:

Watch videos



Use social media



Play games



## How does screen time relate to motivation at school?

The data show that as students increased their screen use during the COVID-19 pandemic, their motivation and academic performance decreased.

### Increase in certain types of screen use during the pandemic

(e.g., social media, video games, online videos, information and news sites)<sup>1</sup>

	No increase	Increase in <b>one or two types</b> of screen use	Increase in <b>three or more</b> types of screen use
Students who experienced a considerable reduction in <b>their motivation</b>	18.6%	30.9%	34.7%
Students whose <b>grades</b> were negatively affected by screen use	4.5%	12.7%	24.4%

However, the correlation between these two factors merits more in-depth study. It could also be that lower motivation at school could be a cause of increased screen time.

## Other effects of increased screen time during the COVID-19 pandemic

Among students with the highest increases in screen time during the pandemic<sup>1</sup>

- 42% indicated being significantly less physically active
- 32% mentioned that screens often hindered their sleep
- 38% stated having fair or poor morale
- 22% declared being dissatisfied with life



## Good news – despite the increase in leisure screen time during the pandemic

A larger proportion of young people whose leisure screen use increased the most during the pandemic say they are tired of it.

### Increase in certain types of screen use during the pandemic

(e.g., social media, video games, online videos, information and news sites)<sup>1</sup>

	No increase	Increase in <b>one or two types</b> of screen use	Increase in <b>three or more</b> types of screen use
Students who are tired of screens	6.5%	8.6%	20%

## Did you know?



Two recent studies<sup>2</sup> showed that, contrary to popular belief, time spent watching television does not significantly impact students' grades. This may be because watching television does not affect one's emotional or cognitive skills, and that time spent watching television does not replace activities that might otherwise promote academic achievement. The researchers do stress, however, that their conclusions should be interpreted with caution, especially when it comes to types of screens that, increasingly, are always accessible.

## Resources

Online habits			Internet addiction
<a href="#">Bien-être numérique</a>	<a href="#">Pause ton écran</a>	<a href="#">La face cachée des écrans</a>	<a href="#">DÉBA-Internet</a>
Workshops and lectures (and other forthcoming resources) on balanced and mindful use of the internet, smart phones and social media (in French).	Suggestions and advice for youth, parents, and practitioners to promote better online habits (in French).	An internet awareness workshop offered by the Maison Jean Lapointe to promote balanced screen time and healthy time management (in French).	A screening and assessment tool for people who may need help with problematic internet use (in French).



**And for pre-schoolers, since screen use often starts very young.**

### [Avec nos enfants, sans écran](#)

Alternative activities to using screens at various times of the day. (in French).

<sup>1</sup> It is important to specify that these data were collected during a lockdown, when major restrictions were in effect (curfew, partial distance learning, suspension of extracurricular activities, etc.)

<sup>2</sup> W. Supper, F. Guay, and D. Talbot (2021) "The Relation Between Television Viewing Time and Reading Achievement in Elementary School Children: A Test of Substitution and Inhibition Hypotheses." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12:580763. [Online: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.580763/full>] and W. Supper, D. Talbot, and F. Guay (2021). "Association Between Television Viewing Time and the Academic Performance of Children and Adolescents: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Longitudinal Studies Conducted to Date." *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science / Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*.



Except where otherwise noted, the information on this factsheet comes from a presentation on Montréal teens' screen use (*Regard sur l'utilisation des écrans chez les adolescents montréalais en contexte de pandémie*) given by Jean-François Biron of Montréal's regional public health department on November 25, 2021 as part of Réseau réussite Montréal's webinar on screens and teens during the pandemic: Écrans et adolescent(e)s en contexte de pandémie.

reseauussitemontreal.ca



Réseau réussite  
Montréal