

PLEXUS

A quarterly e-newsletter by the Primary Care Academy

Editorial Foreword

This issue of Plexus focusses on two insidious areas of addiction in Singapore. One is vaping and the other is screen addiction. The 1st article is about, ***"Doc, what are the risks of vaping?"***. Coinciding with World No Tobacco Day (31 May), we look at a new emerging challenge, globally. In Singapore although it is banned, the author cites a Straits Times article on the increased prevalence of vaping.

In a Straits times article dated Nov 2024, Touch Community Services, which runs a counselling intervention programme for young people struggling with excessive use of digital devices, saw a 58% rise in internet addiction cases from 70 cases in 2019 to 111 cases in 2022.

The 2nd article on, ***"Remedy for the Malady of Adult Screen-time Addiction"***, addresses this emerging challenge and provides some simple tips and 'remedies' to address the issue.

We hope healthcare practitioners find these articles on emerging issues, useful!

Editors

Dr Darren Seah
Dr Predeebha Kannan
Dr Eugene Chua
Dr Ian Koh

Contributors

Dr Jason Chan
Ms Yeo Jia Qi
Dr Lim Jia Qing
Ms Sumathi Rajagopal

Design Executive

Alycia Cheow



"If you can quit for a day, you can quit for a lifetime."

– Benjamin Alire Sáenz

*"Wherever the Art of Medicine is loved,
there is also a love of humanity"*

– Hippocrates, Father of Medicine



A publication by



Doc, what are the risks of vaping?

*By: Dr Jason Chan, Family Physician – Consultant, Assistant Director, Family Medicine Development; Programme Director, NHG Family Medicine Residency programme, and
Ms Yeo Jia Qi, Sr Clinical Pharmacist, NHG Pharmacy*



Mrs Sara came to see her doctor at the polyclinic for her usual diabetes follow-up. After the consult she hesitantly asks her doctor,

“Doc, I hope you don’t mind. I see a lot of stories about vaping in other countries. My nephew sometimes travels overseas, and he has shared with me that it’s quite fun that it is so easily available in our neighbouring country. It’s just a nagging fear. I just want to find out what are the dangers of vaping and how I can advise someone against it?”

In Singapore, tobacco kills 2,500 smokers and 250 non-smokers annually¹, with an annual social cost of smoking in Singapore estimated to be at least US\$479.8 million in 2014. Most of this cost was attributable to productivity losses (US\$464.9 million) and largely concentrated in the male population (US\$434.9 million)². The purchase, use or possession of vapes jumped 58 per cent to about 7,900 cases in 2023, from about 5,000 cases in 2022³. Vaping is an emerging concern particularly among young adults with misconceptions about its safety, and a desire to fit in with their peers or project a rebellious image³.

Benefits of quitting smoking¹



After 72h	Breathing becomes easier
3 months	Blood circulation and lung function improve
1-9 months	Cough, breathlessness, fatigue decreases
1 year	Coronary heart disease (CAD) risk decreases 50%
After 5-10 years	CAD and stroke risk is similar to non-smokers. Lung cancer risk decreases to 50% of non-smokers



Reduced respiratory infections



Enhanced taste/smell



Significant financial savings

Practical steps to quit smoking⁴



Set a quit date, prepare mentally



Combination Nicotine Replacement Therapy:

Long-acting:

- Nicotinell (24h)
- Nicorette (16h) patch

Short-acting:

- Lozenges
- Gum
- Mouth spray



Prescription medications
(under medical supervision):

Varenicline:

- Reduces cravings, withdrawal and smoking-derived satisfaction



Behavioral strategies:

- Healthy distractions
- Avoid triggers (alcohol, caffeine)
- Manage stress



Vaping: A Related Concern⁴

Vaping is definitely NOT a "safe" alternative to smoking (common misconception)!

Vaping devices contain **nicotine** which is addictive, and **carcinogens** (such as formaldehyde and benzene) which are linked to increased respiratory symptoms, lung disorders and cancer. E-cigarettes and vaping are illegal. All offenders who are caught for the purchase, use and possession offences for e-vaporizers, including offenders in schools and institutions of higher learning, will be referred to the Health Sciences Authority. First-time offenders face fines of up to \$2,000.

Getting Professional Help for Smoking Cessation/Nicotine Addiction

Healthcare providers play a crucial role in this. It is advisable to work with doctors or pharmacists to create personalised quit plans.

Available support services:

- Pharmacist smoking cessation clinics (hospitals, polyclinics, retail)
- "I Quit" program by HPB for free advice and tips
- QuitLine (1800-438-2000) to speak to friendly counsellors

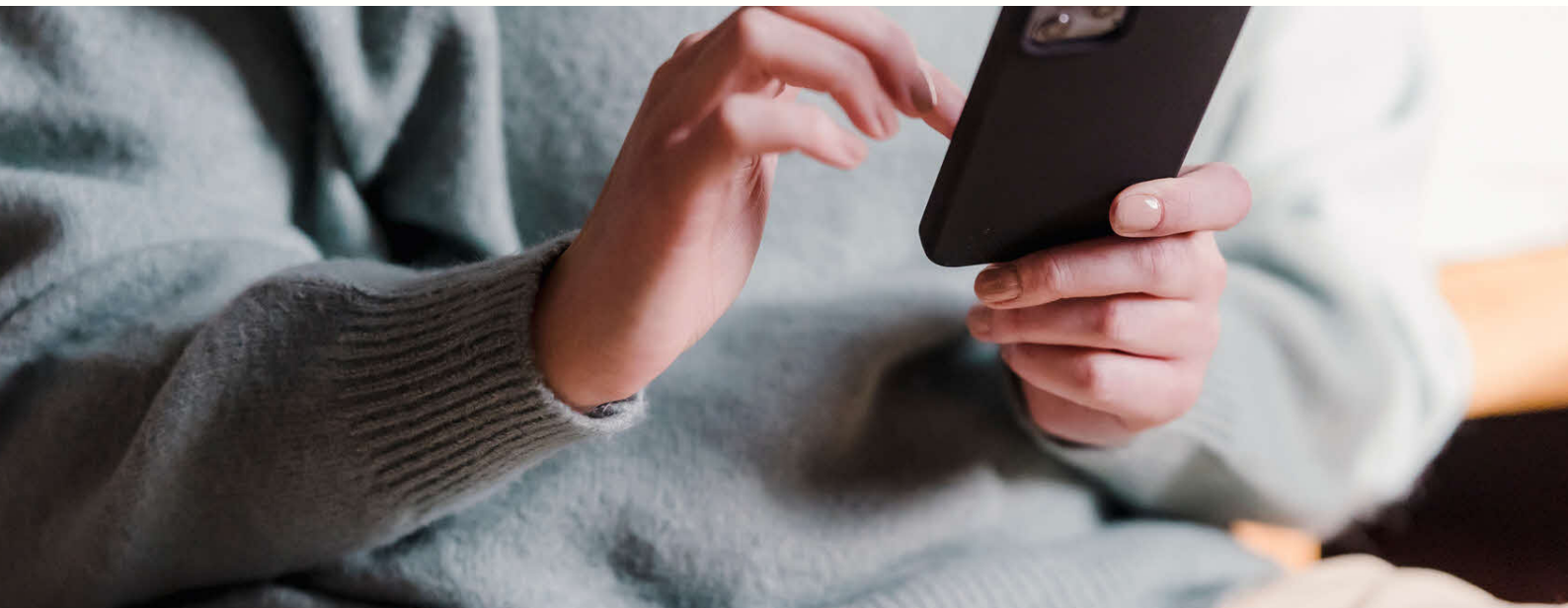


CONCLUSION

- ① It is never too late to quit smoking or vaping – benefits start within minutes.
- ② Key resources available: Smoking cessation clinics, "I Quit", QuitLine
- ③ Encourage patients to seek help for smoking or vaping cessation today!

Remedy for the Malady of Adult Screen-time Addiction

*By: Dr Lim Jia Qing, Family Physician, Khatib Polyclinic and
Ms Sumathi Rajagopal, Psychologist, Hougang Polyclinic
National Healthcare Group Polyclinics*



Mr Lee, a 21-year-old university student, walks into the doctor's consult room, eyes still glued onto his smartphone screen, earphones fitting snugly in both ears. Upon entering the room, he puts up his palm, signifying for the doctor to pause while he packs up his devices. "I'm having a headache. I could not sleep again last night," he says, as he fumbles to pause the ongoing video and put it away. The doctor dutifully goes through a detailed history, concluding that he has unhealthy screen time habits that likely contributed to his poor sleep and headache.

"Can you help me?" he asks.

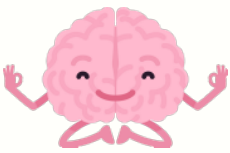
Excessive screen time has emerged as a significant concern among adults worldwide, including Singapore. It has been linked to detrimental effects on both physical and mental health. A study by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) in 2024 revealed that 30.2% of Singaporeans aged 15 to 65 exhibit problematic smartphone use, characterized by dependence on devices and the adverse consequences of their usage¹. While there remains no official diagnostic criterion for screen-time addiction, there has been significant discourse on its impact on human health.

Impact of Screen Time Addiction



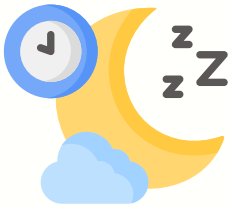
Physical Health

Prolonged screen usage contributes to a sedentary lifestyle, increasing the risk of chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases ². Moreover, excessive screen time can lead to "tech neck" – or poor posture while using devices – leading to chronic neck and back pain ³. Common symptoms of excessive screen use also include eye strain, teary eyes and dry eyes.



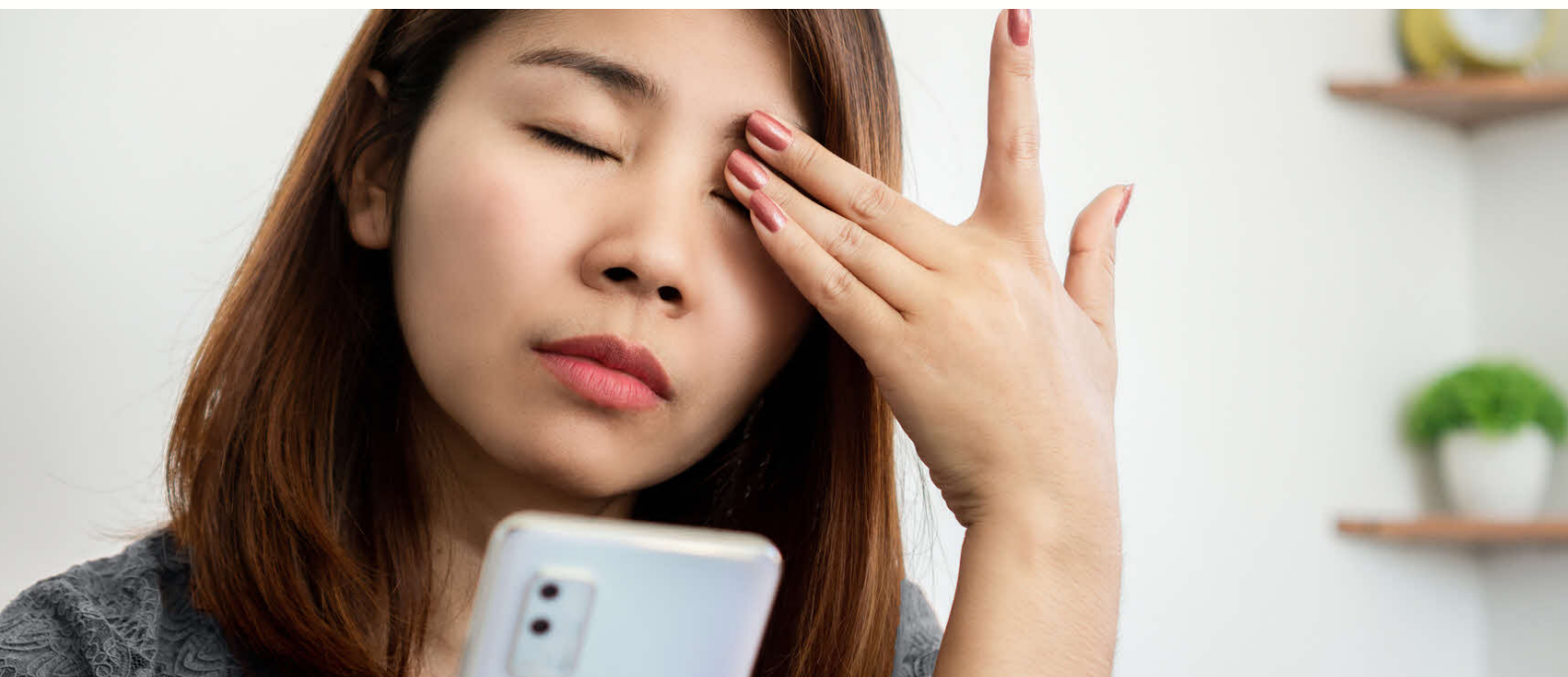
Mental Health

A study conducted in Singapore found that adults who spent more than four hours per day on screens were more likely to experience sleep disturbances and have increased anxiety, depression, and poorer self-esteem ⁴. The constant influx of information and pressure to engage online can reduce a person's capacity to respond to and cope well with stress, leading to difficulties in concentration, and social isolation.



Sleep Quality

Addiction to social media and internet gaming has been linked to reduced sleep quality, via mediators of lower impulse control and increased bedtime procrastination ⁵.



Suggested Remedies

Primary care physicians in Singapore can address screen time addiction by bringing awareness to this issue and suggesting ways to deal with it.

Some practical solutions are suggested below:

Encourage Mindful Device Usage:

Monitoring screen time and setting daily limits (<2 hours a day for recreational screen time) can be a great start to reducing screen time. Most operating systems (Windows, Android, Apple) come with in-built digital wellness features to help track screen time and provide feedback on usage patterns. They can also be used to set limits on screen time, which can assist individuals in managing their screen time effectively.



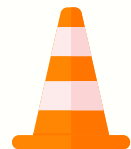
Make Access Difficult:

Suggest to patients to set a long password and disable fingerprint/facial login. This makes logging in more difficult, but that slight delay may help reduce the urge to turn on the screen.



Consider Screen Free Zones/Times:

Encourage patients to keep their screens away when they are at home, such as by keeping it plugged to the wall for charging. Within the house, there can also be designated screen free zones (e.g. dining room, on the bed), which can in turn encourage further social connection with others. Patients should also be strongly encouraged to avoid screen time an hour before bed.



Promote Physical Activity & Movement:

Encourage patients to engage in regular physical activity to counteract sedentary behaviours associated with screen use. Such activities often preclude the use of mobile devices as well, such as jogging, swimming or cycling.



Suggest Alternate Activities:

Instead of scrolling social media while on the commute, why not read a book from the library? Instead of watching TV to destress after work, why not play a musical instrument? Personalising the recommendation is key.



In conclusion, the rising concern of excessive screen time among adults highlights the need for greater awareness and proactive measures to mitigate its adverse effects on physical and mental health. Primary care physicians can play an active role in identifying and addressing this issue in the community. Ultimately, fostering a balanced relationship with technology use will allow individuals to reap the most benefits from screen time without its undesirable consequences.

PRIMARY CARE ACADEMY

Primary Care Academy (PCA) is a one-stop, regional training centre catering to the training needs and skills upgrading of primary care doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and ancillary staff in primary care. Besides, PCA also provides informative and interactive health talks and workshops for community/public and corporate audiences alike.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Clinic Assistant Course



Basic Level

Module 1: 12 Jul or 5 Aug 2025
Module 2: 15 Jul or 16 Aug 2025
Module 3: 26 Jul or 19 Aug 2025
Module 4: 22 Jul or 30 Aug 2025

1.30pm - 6.00pm

Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic

For more information, visit

<https://for.sg/rlfo5b>

Course fees apply. National Silver Academy (NSA) subsidies available & SkillsFuture credit claimable.

Life Support Course



BCLS + AED Certification

3 Oct 2025

**8.30am - 12.30pm,
2.00pm - 6.00pm**

Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic

For more information, visit

<https://for.sg/pcalifesupport>

Course fees apply. National Silver Academy (NSA) subsidies available & SkillsFuture credit claimable.

TEACHING 101



10, 31 Jul 2025

2.00pm to 5.30pm

Yishun Polyclinic

For more information, visit

<https://for.sg/teaching101>

Health In A Nutshell Public Health Talk



16 Jul 2025

1.00pm - 2.00pm

Travelling Medicines

For more information, visit

<https://for.sg/blvu09>

Contact us

secretariat@pca.sg

6496 6127 / 6496 6682



<https://for.sg/pcamail>

At PCA, learning never stops.