


# The Tech Monster lurking inside

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As you are reading this column, you are looking at a screen either on a computer, tablet or smartphone. If you are like the majority of Americans using technology to read this column, you have other messages from apps popping up or a tone to alert you to a message. When the tone chimes or the message appears, you make a split-second decision: choose to respond immediately or let it go until after you are finished reading. Don't worry, this article can wait, answer the message and click back...or should you abstain?

At a Zócalo/UCLA event in 2016, a panel of experts delivered a foreboding message regarding technology. What do you suppose the topic of the evening was that had the audience on the edge of their seats? Well, the question directed to the panel of experts that had the audience hooked- ***"All this digital technology — this explosion we've all seen in our hands — is it doing more harm than good?"***

From the panel's answers that evening to the countless research studies that have followed, the answer to the question is no longer shocking. When we use technology, not only are we destroying our health but we are altering our bodies at a cellular level. And if you have been checking messages in between reading this article, you are already experiencing the highest cost of technology...becoming addicted. How is it that the device in your hand has the same effects as alcohol and drugs?

Robert Lustig, a professor of pediatrics focused on endocrinology at the University of Southern California and author of *The Hacking of the American Mind* has concluded, "Technology, like all other 'rewards', can over release dopamine, overexcite and kill neurons, leading to addiction." In fact, he found through multiple research studies that our brain responds to technology in the same way it responds to other addictive substances.

So what exactly does too much use of technology do to our brain to create an addiction? Just like too much stimuli in our lives causes stress in our bodies, too much technology causes stress in our brains which leads to negative effects. This effect increases how much dopamine our body releases. When our brain gets used to a higher level of dopamine, it wants us to keep seeking out the addictive substance or habit.

Which leads us to the ABCDE's of addiction: Technology Edition. Our inability to consistently ***abstain*** from our gadgets is leading to impairments in ***behavioral*** control. When a message alert goes off, we immediately ***crave*** the reward from either a text or

social media post. Unaware to us, our need to know is creating *diminished* recognition causing significant problems within our behaviors and personal relationships. In our need to communicate more efficiently and frequently, we are instead breaking down communication! The result- a dysfunctional *emotional* response that leads to depression and chronic health issues. Therefore, if you could not refrain from checking your messages to read 500 words, you may just be addicted to technology.