



## Effects of Losing A Pet on Mental Health

**P**ets have been a part of our life for centuries and they bring us happiness, peace of mind and help with our mental health as well and because of this, the death or loss of a pet can be a taxing and traumatic experience. Loss of the pet could be a result of sickness which causes burden on the owner / caregiver who may have to choose to put down the pet, i.e. euthanasia. One may lose their pet also because they died of natural causes, through accidents or may run away and simply not give the owner an opportunity for closure. This loss can result in grief and bereavement.

Among the earliest researches on pets and mental health include a study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania. They measured what happens to the body when a person pets a friendly dog and the results showed decreased blood pressure, slowed heart rate, more regular breathing and relaxed

muscle tensions. All these signs are related to reduce stress hence showing physical evidence of benefits of having pets on mental health.

Animals also play a role in animal assisted therapy, in cases like emotional support dogs play a vital role. There are also equine therapy programs which involve human-horse connection allowing people, especially teen to address emotional issues. This is possible through the powerful, direct experience of nonverbal communication. Pets at home help in lowering stress, anxiety and stress related to children, they help us feel needed and provide us with a sense of purpose and meaning, benefitting in reducing depression and loneliness.

Other studies in the field state that pet owners had improved well-being in various areas, including better self-esteem, less fear, they were more

physically fit, less lonely, more conscientious and less preoccupied along with more extroverted. Pets also help people be more mindful and be in the moment like dogs and cats and when recovering from a mental illness, pets help the owner feel more in control of his environment, feel security and routine, hence helping recovery. They help us build healthy habits, communication skills and social connections. Having a pet provides us with a healthy life and

cases, whereas suppressing feelings or in cases of children, quick replacement of the pet may lead to feelings disloyalty. Hence it is necessary that one addresses this issue however they see fit, whether it is by talking about it to a friend, family member or a professional, reaching out to others who have lost pets, following rituals like holding a funeral, and if one has other pets then trying to follow a normal routine for them.



makes us feel good in general. But when due to illness or any other loss, we lose our pet then it affects our mental health adversely making us feel like things have spiraled out of our control, affecting our physical as well as social life sometimes.

Grief that follows after losing a pet, is a highly individual process, some people grieve in stages like experience feelings such as denial, anger, guilt, depression, and eventually acceptance and resolution, while some others may feel it differently. It is a very gradual process, and cannot be rushed. Expression of grief and sadness can help in most

Losing a beloved pet is often an emotionally devastating experience yet the society does not allow pet owners to grieve the loss of their pet properly. A study of 2017 states that symptoms of losing a pet can be similar to losing a loved one and include acute grief which can last from one to two months, with symptoms of grief persisting up to a full year (on average).

Several societal mechanisms are absent when it comes to the death of a pet and people tend to lack social support for people who experience something like this. Statements like 'you can always get another



pet' are very common in our society. Society robs us of our support systems and this leads to further distress since studies prove that social support is necessary when it comes to recovering from any kind of grief. Pets not only support our emotional wellbeing but also help us cope up psychologically.

Caregiver burden in pet owners leads to elevated stress and the general symptoms of depression and anxiety erupts, as well as poorer quality of life. Results show that people with sick animals show higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety in comparison to people with healthy pets.

Some individuals also manifest psychosomatic symptoms after the death of their pets and complain of the following symptoms: disturbed sleeping patterns, eating disorders, decreased social activity, job-related difficulties, and loss of motivation, stress, self-harm, depression, anxiety, worry, pining, loneliness, guilt pangs, flashbacks and feelings of emptiness. Although many of these symptoms are easily resolved, others require professional intervention.

All these studies claim that recovering from pet loss, as in all forms of grief, requires us to recognize these symptoms and find ways to deal with them. Seeking social support is necessary in such situations and many animal clinics also offer bereavement groups for pet owners.

It is necessary to give pet owners the time, sympathy, recognition, support and consideration that they need in order to recover from it. Validation helps us recover better and quicker and helps in our overall psychological recovery, as pet loss, like any other loss, requires us to pay proper attention to our mental health and focus on the symptoms that accompany it so one can get better.



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## Damaging Mental Health *Smartphone Addiction*

**T**he recent flare-up of smartphones has provided people with the ability to use the Internet at any given moment. Everybody owns a smartphone and for some this may not be problematic but some people develop an addiction.

The functionalities of the smartphone are constantly being improved, which has amplified the chances of overuse and addiction. It's true that the improvement of technology has led to several conveniences; it has also brought other problems. It has impacted people's lives to a great extent. Smartphone addiction can be called as a dependence syndrome. This term was used by World Health Organisation in the year of 1964. It is considered as substance abuse or an addiction that is behavioural.

Smartphones are easily accessible to children these days. Teenagers are also getting addicted to their phones. Smartphones have now become a symbol of social status. Individuals who use a specific brand or the new models feel proud and 'up-to-date'. This initiates the pressure to buy the latest phones and to install all the latest applications. Smartphone addiction can encompass a variety of impulse control problems, such as virtual relationships, addiction to

social networking, dating apps, texting, and messaging can extend to the point where virtual, online friends become more important than real life relationships. We've all seen the couples sitting together in a restaurant ignoring each other and engaging with their smartphones instead. While the Internet can be a great place to meet new people, reconnect with old friends, or even start romantic relationships, online relationships are not a healthy substitute for real life interactions.

Online friendships can be appealing as they tend to exist in a bubble, not subject to the same demands or stresses as messy, real-world relationships. Compulsive use of dating apps can change your focus to short term hook ups instead of developing long term relationships. Information overload is another problem that causes compulsive web surfing, watching videos, playing games, or checking news feeds can lead to lower productivity at work or school and isolate you for hours at a time.

Compulsive use of the Internet and smartphone apps can cause you to neglect other aspects of your life, from real-world relationships to hobbies and social pursuits. Third problem that originates is Cybersex

Addiction, compulsive use of Internet pornography, sexting, nude swapping, or adult messaging services can impact negatively on your real-life intimate relationships and overall emotional health.

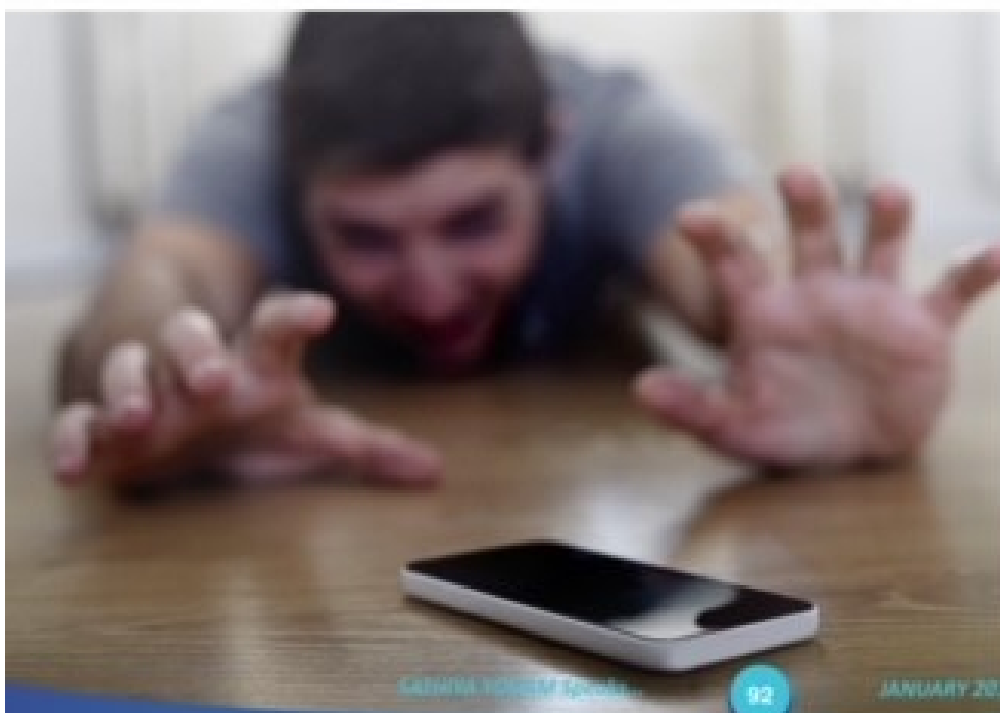
While online pornography and cybersex addictions are types of sexual addiction, the Internet makes it more accessible, relatively anonymous, and very convenient. It's easy to spend hours engaging in fantasies impossible in real life. Excessive use of dating apps that facilitate casual sex can make it more difficult to develop long-term intimate relationships or damage an existing relationship.

The fourth problem is online compulsions, such as gaming, gambling, stock trading, online shopping, or bidding on auction sites like eBay can often lead to financial and job-related problems. While gambling addiction has been a well-documented problem for years, the availability of Internet gambling has made gambling far more accessible. Compulsive stock trading or online shopping can be just as financially and socially damaging. E-Bay addicts may wake up at strange hours in order to be online for the last remaining minutes of an auction.

You may purchase things you don't need and can't afford just to experience the excitement of placing the winning bid. While one can experience impulse-control problems with a laptop or desktop computer, the size and convenience of smartphones and tablets means that it can be taken just about anywhere to gratify compulsions at any time. In fact, most people are rarely ever more than five feet from our smartphones. Like the use of drugs and alcohol, they can trigger the release of the brain chemical dopamine and alter your mood. One can also rapidly build up tolerance so that it takes more and more time in front of these screens to derive the same pleasurable reward. After reviewing all the researches that investigated the causes of phone addiction in males and females, it is seen that there are a variety of causes for this addiction.

It has been seen that prevalence of depression in males and females can also lead to smartphone addiction. The higher the perception of parental controls by the child/teen, greater the chances of cell phone addiction. Using smartphone for functions such as social media, gaming, online messaging and video watching was assigned to be positively related with smartphone addiction. Young adults that are going through extreme stress and low mood may not have positive stress coping mechanisms and techniques to manage mood and are thus highly susceptible to smartphone addiction.

Innumerable problems occur during Smartphone Addiction some of the problems are increased loneliness and depression, a 2014 study found a correlation between high social media usage and depression and anxiety.





Users, especially teens, tend to compare themselves unfavourably with their peers on social media, promoting feelings of loneliness and depression. Fuels anxiety, one researcher found that the mere presence of a phone in a work place tends to make people more anxious and perform poorly on given tasks.

The heavier a people phone use, the greater the anxiety they experienced. Increased stress, using a smartphone for work often means work bleeds into your home and personal life. You feel the pressure to always be on, never out of touch from work. This need to continually check and respond to email can contribute to higher stress levels or even burnout. It exacerbates attention deficit disorders, the constant stream of messages and information from a smartphone can overwhelm the brain and make it impossible to focus attention on any one thing for more than a few minutes without feeling compelled to move on to something else.

Diminishes ability to concentrate and think deeply or creatively, the persistent buzz, ping or beep of your smartphone can distract you from important tasks, slow your work, and interrupt those quiet moments that are so crucial to creativity and problem solving. Instead of ever being alone with our thoughts, we're now always online and connected. Disturbed sleep, excessive smartphone

use can disrupt your sleep, which can have a serious impact on your overall mental health. It can impact your memory, affect your ability to think clearly, and reduce your cognitive and learning skills.

Encourages self-absorption, a UK study found that people who spend a lot of time on social media are more likely to display negative personality traits such as narcissism. Snapping endless selfies, posting all your thoughts or details about your life can create an unhealthy self-centeredness, distancing you from real-life relationships and making it harder to cope with stress.

Treatment for smartphone and Internet addiction is essential to be employed looking at the present scenario. There are specialist treatment centres that offer digital detox programs to help disconnect from digital media. Individual and group therapy can also give a tremendous boost in controlling technology use. Cognitive-behavioural therapy provides step-by-step ways to stop compulsive behaviours and change perceptions about smartphone and the Internet. Therapy can also help one learn healthier ways of coping with uncomfortable emotions such as stress, anxiety, or depression that may be fuelling the smartphone use.

Marriage or couples counselling if excessive use of Internet pornography or online affairs is affecting your relationship, counselling can help one work through these challenging issues and reconnect with their partners. Group support, organizations such as Internet Tech Addiction Anonymous (ITAA) and On Line Gamers Anonymous offer online support and face-to-face meetings to curb excessive technology use.



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