

Excessive screen time may trigger heart attacks

New Straits Times · 12 Jan 2026 · 13 · By Meera Murugesan meera@nst.com.my

COULD your screen habits be slowly killing you? It may sound implausible, but it can actually happen. Excessive screen time leading to “digital burnout” is a real and current problem and its impact on overall health is significant.



Raised blood pressure, increased cortisol levels, disrupted sleep and long hours of being sedentary all have an impact on the heart.

Excessive screen time can be defined as more than six to eight hours a day of gadget use, says Prince Court Medical Centre consultant cardiologist Dr Johan Rizwal Ismail.

To make matters worse, many people continue to use their devices well into the night, leading to suppression of the hormone melatonin which controls the sleep-wake cycle.

“When this process is repeated day after day, sleep deprivation will increase the person’s blood pressure, and in a few years, these patients will present with hypertension and heart disease,” says Dr Johan.

This is especially prevalent among young adults because even after work, they continue with screen time.

They go home and are still hooked to their screens, either because of gaming or other online activities.

HOOKED TO THE SCREEN

Dr Johan says we can see this pattern played out in the extreme among those who are influencers. They don’t “switch off” and are glued to their screens for almost 18 to 20 hours a day.

About three years after Covid-19, doctors started seeing an increase in the number of young people with hypertension, he adds, and when we dig deeper into the history of these patients, it becomes evident that they seriously lack sleep due to gaming, content creation and other online activities.

A digital curfew is crucial to address this problem, says Dr Johan.

Set a time at the end of the day when you will no longer turn to your device and stick to it. Around 15 minutes before bedtime, put away all devices.

MEANINGFUL BREAKS

During the day, apply the “22” rule, which means 20 minutes of screen time followed by two minutes of stretching at your desk or get up and walk.

“We need cardiovascular activity every day and if one is seated most of the day, there won’t be improvement in the heart rate.”

Stress is also a major factor for heart attacks among young people, he adds.

Many young adults are hooked on their gadgets all the time, constantly “tied” to the office, always multitasking

and this increases their stress levels.

“They are never truly disconnected from the workplace or whatever they are involved in. There is no time off or unwinding, which is very important for heart health.”

Many young adults are unaware of this, explains Dr Johan.

They may feel fine and healthy now, so they see no reason to change their lifestyle.

But a few years down the road, when a heart attack happens, everyone is caught off guard.

Your body will always give you signs that something is not right, adds Dr Johan, and it’s best to not ignore these signs.

If you feel fatigued all the time, become breathless during physical activity or exertion or have chest pain or tightness, see a doctor immediately.

Changing our screen time habits is a small price to pay for better heart health.