

GUARDIAN Health chronicle



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Free v

I'll call you back

Gone are the days when an average household was content with a landline number which was capable of serving the interests of the whole family. Time has changed and each member of the family keeps a cell phone. Mobile no longer serves as a gadget to make our lives simpler, rather it overwhelms us. Archana Darshan explores the subject of mobile overuse.

Cell phones are our moving database of contacts and have given a new dimension to multitasking. No surprise, loss of a mobile is mourned for days together, because hardly we jot down our contacts. While we can't dispense with a cell phone, using it behind the wheels can cut short your life.

STAY IN TOUCH

Meghana runs her own HR consultancy. Mobiles are indispensable for her and she has to be prompt in returning calls and messages to be successful. Of late, she imagines that her phone is ringing, though it's not. Dr. Deepak Raheja, Head Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at Paras Hospitals says, "Meghana is not alone. There are many who would give her company. The desire to be in reach all the time has given rise to phantom disorders in people called ringxiety."

"Though no such official term has been coined," says Dr. Rachna Singh, Lifestyle Consultant at Artemis, "This much is for sure that the term denotes the imminent need to pick up phone the moment it rings." We all have seen mobiles buzz in concerts, meetings, cinema halls, hospitals and parent-teacher meetings, where they should be silent.

You might ask, what's the harm? After all mobiles were designed so that we could stay in touch. But, too much of it is hampering your quality of life, have created permeable work-life boundaries and you never switch off from work either on vacation or at home. This means you never rest and rejuvenate enough to handle work

stress with enthusiasm. Moreover, your body complains though you decide to ignore the symptoms.

CELLPHONE COMPLAINTS

Dr. Deepak Sarin, Consultant Head and Neck Surgery at Artemis says, "These days I am seeing that more and more young people are coming to me complaining of ear problems, like pain and discomfort in ears."

Repeated use of cell phones can give rise to conditions like cell phone elbow. In medical speak the condition is called Cubital Tunnel Syndrome. Cell phone elbow is numbness, tingling and pain in the forearm and hand caused by compression of the ulnar nerve, which passes along the bony bump on the inside of the elbow.

"In susceptible people, holding the bent-elbow position for extended periods can lead to decreased blood flow, inflammation and compression of the nerve. "One of the causes of pressure on the ulnar nerve is excessive use of mobile phones," says Dr KK Aggarwal President Heart Care Foundation of India. As symptoms progress, they can include a loss of muscle strength, coordination and mobility that can make writing and typing difficult. In chronic, untreated cases, the ring finger and pinky can become clawed.

Another disorder associated with mobile phones is the - 'Blackberry Thumb Syndrome'. Users constantly keep checking their messages at weird hours like '02:00 am' for any important

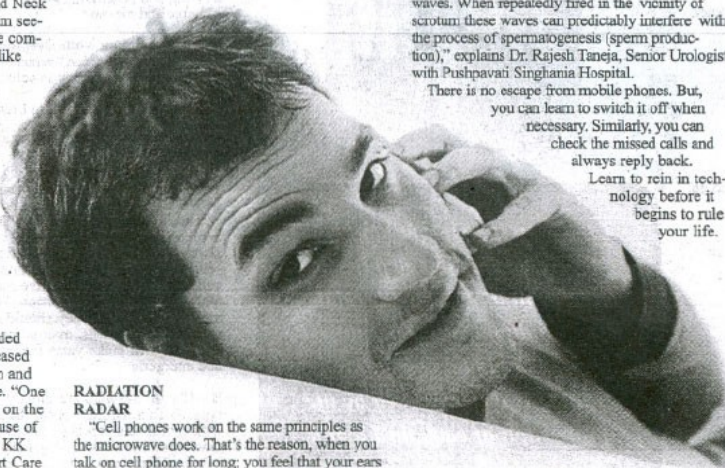
message that they do not wish to miss. Repetitive stress injury of the thumb occurs as a result of overusing and constant pressing of the small gadget keypads.

adds Dr Atul.

Besides, cell phones can negatively affect men's fertility. Normally, men tuck phones in their trousers or hang it on belt. "Mobile phones are known to generate very strong electromagnetic waves. When repeatedly fired in the vicinity of scrotum these waves can predictably interfere with the process of spermatogenesis (sperm production)," explains Dr. Rajeshi Taneja, Senior Urologist with Pushpavati Singhania Hospital.

There is no escape from mobile phones. But, you can learn to switch it off when necessary. Similarly, you can check the missed calls and always reply back.

Learn to rein in technology before it begins to rule your life.



RADIATION RADAR

"Cell phones work on the same principles as the microwave does. That's the reason, when you talk on cell phone for long, you feel that your ears are on fire. Hands free are better in a way while talking on cell phone because it screens you from the radiation emanating from the phone", says Dr. Atul Mittal, Senior ENT Consultant with Max Healthcare.

"However, be warned that prolonged use of headphones can cause external ear infections. You might lose the ability to hear high pitched sounds,"

(With inputs from Dr. Deepak Sarin, Consultant Head and Neck Surgery, Artemis)