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Brain Rot: Are Our Smartphones Making Us Stupid?

Premier Health Now

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Since 2004, the Oxford University Press has annually chosen a word that has highlighted or reflected the cultural tone and sentiment of the previous twelve months and crowned it as their “Word of the Year.”

This year, “brain rot” was selected as [the word that best defined 2024](#), which they define as “the supposed deterioration of a person’s mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging.”

How do our modern devices and tools for consuming data have an impact upon our mental and even our physical health? Is “brain rot” a real thing, and if so, what can be done to stop it?

Premier Health Now spoke with Dr. Fadi Tayim, Clinical Neuropsychologist and Division Chief of the Brain Mapping Center at the Clinical Neuroscience Institute, to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon and to find out what can be done to overcome it.

Garbage In, Garbage Out

Though “brain rot” may indeed seem to capture the essence of our modern culture as it tries to cope with the effects of processing too much information, its roots go back almost two centuries.

“Brain rot is actually a term that originated nearly 200 years ago,” Dr. Tayim says. “Author James Henry Thoreau coined the phrase to describe what happens in society when it chronically dumbs things down from their original, complicated concept, which leads to a kind of societal downgrade. What brain rot now refers to is not that much different. Today the term describes the cognitive, emotional, anatomical, and physiological impact that comes from repeatedly engaging with low quality content.”

Dr. Tayim notes that it is not unusual for the average consumer to spend between five and eight hours per day simply scrolling through short video reels on social media platforms such as TikTok or YouTube. Studies reveal that the effects may be more damaging than meets the eye so Dr. Tayim recommends

that people should limit themselves to no more than an hour of screen time per day.

“What we're seeing now is that there's a thinning of the cortex, which is the outer layer of the brain,” says Dr. Tayim. “This results in cognitive delays and attention and concentration deficits. It can cause early aging signs as well, like memory loss and short-term memory loss. So, there are anatomical brain changes now linked to this kind of brain rot, caused by over exposure to this low content or low-quality media.”

Dr. Tayim advises smartphone users to seriously limit their screen time each day to preserve and protect their short and long-term mental and physical health.

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