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Should You Be Worried About Digital Dementia?

Should You Be Worried About Digital Dementia?

WHAT IT IS, WHERE IT CAME FROM, AND WHAT IT COULD MEAN FOR OUR SCREEN TIME

Everyone forgets things. It's not unusual to have trouble remembering the name of someone you've just met or recalling the face of a classmate you haven't seen in 20 years. But it's less normal — and a lot more inconvenient — to become chronically absent-minded. If you find yourself struggling to remember the minutiae of daily life, which page of a book you left off on, or when it's time to pick your kids up from soccer practice, digital dementia could be to blame.

The term "digital dementia" was coined in 2012 by German neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer, who studies how our addiction to technology is impacting our brains. According to Alzheimers.net, Spitzer found that "overuse of digital technology is resulting in the breakdown of cognitive abilities in a way that is more commonly seen in people who have suffered a head injury or psychiatric illness." Because of the shared symptoms, Spitzer called the affliction digital dementia.

In the years since, speculation has abounded about the causes of digital dementia and how people can fight it. A 2017 Forbes article theorized that the problem isn't just time spent with screens but how much we rely on our smartphones to feed us once-memorized information.

"In theory, having a device to store phone numbers, dates, maps and directions, and other information like that frees you up to focus on bigger and theoretically more important things," Tony Bradley wrote in Forbes. "If you just use your device as a memory crutch, though, and you don't take advantage of the opportunity to put your brain to work on other things, you aren't exercising your brain, and it will atrophy."

Psychology Today blamed digital dementia in part on the mental strategies encouraged by video games. According to one study, gaming encourages the "response" strategy of following the same rote movements, while nongamers



tend to use the "spatial" strategy of relying on landmarks when they navigate, which is better for mental sharpness.

Whatever the root cause, we can take steps to fight digital dementia. As Dr. Carolyn Brockington told Alzheimers.net, the best strategies involve stepping away from screens and relying on brainpower. The next time you're considering picking up your smartphone, try reading a book, playing a musical instrument, hitting the gym, or learning a new language instead.



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February 2020

SETTING SAIL

Where's Travis This Month?

In February, things get low. The humidity gets low, the temperature gets low, and the number of occupants' complaints gets low as well. This means I'm not as busy in February. After the busy year that was 2019, I'm okay with that. A low February means I get to take a vacation.

The first part of my vacation takes me to West Palm Beach, Florida, for the Indoor Air Quality Association Annual Meeting & Expo. This is a work trip, but I'm really looking forward to the IAQA Meeting because I missed it last year. I'm excited to get together with my colleagues, talk about what's occurred over the last two years, and discuss what we can expect in 2020.

There's a lot of educational sessions being held at the expo, and I'm very interested in one event that could answer a question I've run into in my business. There's been quite a bit of disagreement as to whether or not we should be using antimicrobials when doing mediation. There's going to be a whole debate on the subject, with people I respect on both sides of the topic. I'm not sure if the debate will resolve my issues, but I'm interested to hear what people say.

While it'll be fun for me, a work-related expo isn't much of a vacation. That's why, when the expo is over, my wife and I are hopping on a great big Royal Caribbean cruise ship and setting sail for some rest and relaxation. The last time we went on a cruise was 15 years ago. We enjoyed it then, so we're really looking forward to spending time on the high seas again. This trip is sure to be great fun because two of our friends will be joining us.



"The last time we went on a cruise was 15 years ago. We enjoyed it then, so we're really looking forward to spending time on the high seas again."

Over the last few years, most of my non-work-related traveling has been for rather elaborate family trips. While I've loved visiting our eldest daughter in South Korea or going to San Francisco to see our middle daughter get married, it will be nice to have a few days to just rest in the sun. My plan is to really take advantage of the ultimate food and drink package (responsibly, of course) while hanging out with my wife and our best friends. Relaxing — that's my favorite kind of vacation.

The ship we're going to be on has a casino, which we're all really excited for. Of course, we won't be spending the whole trip on the ship. There are excursions planned for Haiti, Jamaica, and Cozumel. I'm most looking forward to stopping in Cozumel. It's a little island off the coast of Mexico that I've had the pleasure of visiting before. The island is beautiful, and it's a really friendly place. I'm sure it will be the highlight of the trip.

Travis West

4

Mold and IAQ in the Last Frontier

When comparing all 50 states in the union, few places are as different as Texas and Alaska. While we pride ourselves on everything being “bigger” here, the truth is that Texas could fit inside Alaska twice and still have room to spare! Sheer size isn't the only difference. There are many unique challenges to living and working in the Last Frontier. Just ask my friend Martin Schwan, project manager and industrial hygienist with EHS-Alaska, Inc.

Founded in 1986, EHS-Alaska is a hazmat consulting company that initially focused on asbestos inspections. Over the years, the small employee-owned company grew to become a leader in the application of professional engineering and industrial hygiene practices in buildings and the work environment. Martin's job calls him to conduct hazmat surveys, exposure studies, and indoor air quality and mold assessments throughout the state of Alaska — all 663,300 square miles.

Traveling in Alaska isn't as simple as hopping in a car and driving out to the site. Very few places in Alaska can be reached by car. To reach a job site, Martin often has to take a plane before catching an ATV or even a snow machine. Martin hasn't traveled by dog sled yet, unfortunately, but that is his goal for 2020.

“I enjoy traveling all over the place,” Martin says. “The unique travel experiences are a perk of the job. I often have to pack my own sleeping gear and food with me, because these small villages rarely have hotels or restaurants. If I'm going out to do a mold job or scrape paint off a building to check for lead, I have to be ready to sleep in the library or the gym at the local school. The logistics of traveling are very exciting.”

Before getting into the field of industrial hygiene, Martin was a research chemist. Before that, he did lighting design for amusement parks, restaurants, and casinos in Montana. Martin describes himself as a very curious person, and every career he's had has allowed him to learn more.

“Constantly learning is in my DNA,” Martin explains. “In this industry, it's really fascinating to get in there, identify problems, and help building occupants. I also like being able to share my knowledge with others.”

Last December, Martin hosted the first ever mold workshop in Alaska. He was able to teach 32 attendees, many of whom were his own clients, about common misconceptions regarding mold and why moisture is a real problem.

“The truth is, we're breathing in mold spores all day,” Martin reveals. “They rarely bother people in Alaska. But if you have a moisture problem, if sheetrock is touching porous cement or piping isn't insulated properly, then moisture can form and you'll have a real mold problem. My philosophy is, if you don't identify the source of the moisture, then any mold remediations are for naught. The mold will always come back.”

Martin is ready to use all the tools at his disposal to provide his clients with all the information they need to get the best possible solution. This includes air sampling, visual inspections, and relying on his two decades of experience with EHS-Alaska. When a job demands traveling 400 miles to reach the site, you can bet Martin will make sure it's done right the first time.

Danger in the Air

ARE YOUR TENANTS BREATHING IN BAD WATER?

When the day's stress gets to you, taking a deep breath can help you find a sense of clarity again. However, if that breath is taken near an untreated hot tub or in a building with a dirty hot water tank, you could be inviting deadly bacteria into your body.

Legionella is a type of bacteria found naturally in freshwater. When in lakes or streams, the levels of Legionella are usually too low to be a health concern. However, when introduced to human-made building water systems, the bacteria can quickly flourish.

Legionella bacteria thrives in hot water, around 96 degrees F, and is often found in the following products:

- Hot water tanks and heaters
- Cooling towers
- Showerheads and sink faucets
- Hot tubs
- Decorative fountains

If Legionella bacteria is able to escape these water systems and enter the air, it can cause deadly outbreaks of disease.

The Danger of Legionella

After being infected with Legionella bacteria, individuals can develop a severe form of pneumonia called Legionnaires' disease. Coughing, shortness of breath, high fever, and muscle pain are common symptoms. While Legionnaires' disease can be treated successfully with antibiotics, older adults and those with weakened immune systems are particularly susceptible.

Legionnaires' disease cannot spread from person to person. In order to become infected with the disease, individuals have to breathe in small water droplets in the air that contain Legionella bacteria. This is why systems that put water into the air, like steam from a hot tub or mist from a cooling tower, are common sources of Legionnaires' disease.



Thanks to strict safety guidelines, Legionnaires' disease is relatively rare in the United States. However, if human-made water systems are not properly cleaned, Legionella bacteria can flourish. The Centers for Disease Control reports that 1 out of every 10 people who gets Legionnaires' disease will die due to complications from the illness.

Not-so-Happiest Place on Earth

In 2017, there was an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in Anaheim, California. There were 22 known cases in this outbreak and at least one person died. Tests from the Orange County Health Care Agency suggested that the source of all 22 cases was likely a cooling tower in Disneyland. Though Disneyland denied responsibility, elevated levels of Legionella bacteria were found in two of the theme park's cooling towers around the time of the outbreaks.

The towers were shut down and treated with chemicals to kill the bacteria. In March 2018, Cal-OSHA cited and fined Disneyland \$33,000 for failing to properly clean the cooling equipment linked to the outbreak, which infected three Disneyland employees.

The Way to Keep Legionella From Infecting Your Water Supply

The key to preventing Legionnaires' disease is to stop Legionella bacteria from growing in the first place. Proactively managing the risk of Legionella by implementing proper cleaning and maintenance of at-risk water systems is the first step. It's also important to establish routine monitoring and testing for Legionella bacteria.

To reduce the risk of Legionella and Legionnaires' disease, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) has established minimum risk management requirements for building water systems. These can be found at ASHRAE.org.

'Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman'

How Patagonia's Founder Set a New Standard for Environmental Responsibility

From the very beginning of his 2006 memoir, “Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman,” it's clear that Patagonia's founder, Yvon Chouinard, is not the typical entrepreneur. As a kid, Chouinard wanted to be a fur trapper, and rather than going into business with dreams of getting rich, he started making climbing gear to fund his passion for scaling cliffs and adventuring in the outdoors.

“Let My People Go Surfing” follows Patagonia's meteoric rise through its victories and rough patches — including the stalled growth that led to layoffs of 20% of the staff in the 1990s — but its main focus is on the company's ideals. In plain, forthright, and sometimes irascible language, Chouinard lays out Patagonia's growth goals, culture aims, and environmental stewardship efforts.

The last of which is truly the core of the brand. Patagonia prioritizes minimalism, function, durability, and reparability in all of its products, from backpacks to jackets. It tracks the energy and water use of its facilities, works to eliminate pollution, focuses on recycled and recyclable materials, participates in environmental activism, funds environmental organizations worldwide, and even encourages shoppers to send in worn-out apparel for reuse and repair. In short, over the course of 272 pages, Chouinard proves he not only talks the talk but also walks the walk — and has made millions championing his cause. He encourages other entrepreneurs to do the same, laying out Patagonia's footsteps and philosophies for readers to follow. Many already have.

“Let My People Go Surfing” was updated and rereleased in 2016, but either version will make entrepreneurs think twice about their environmental impact and what they can do to reduce it. As one Amazon reviewer wrote, “Whether you're a manager or business owner looking to motivate your employees and create a sustainable business, or a fan of Patagonia, or someone curious about how to live a life you can feel good about, this book should work for you.”



HAVE A LAUGH WITH TRAVIS



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