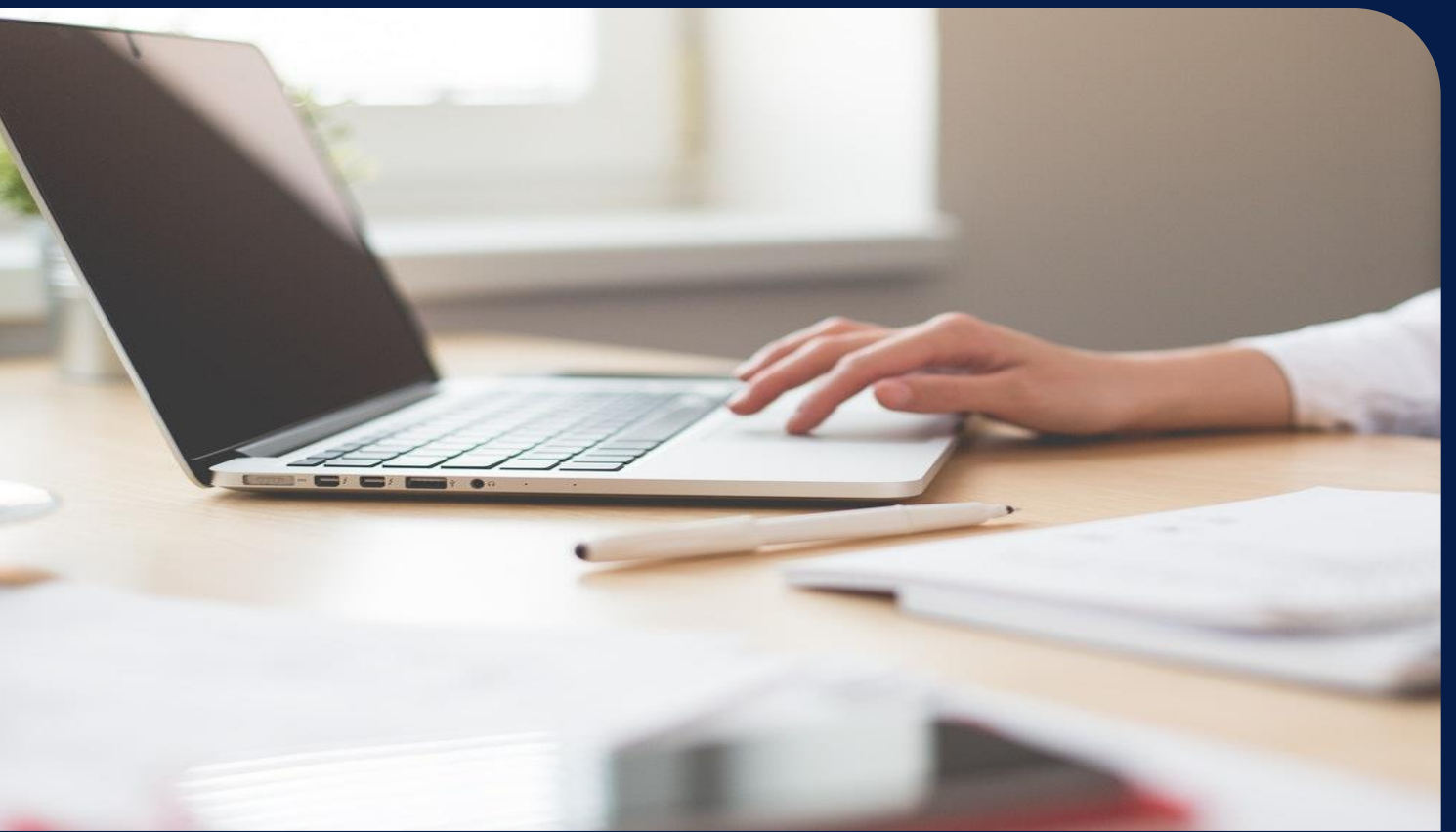




Ministry  
of Defence

# Technostress

## Managing your digital life right now



# What is Technostress?



Technostress is the term for the pressure we experience through having access to IT and department systems while at home, particularly at times of peak workloads. It is sometimes described as having an 'always on culture' or 'being unable to switch off'.

The increase in working from home during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) period means that more people than ever may experience this.



Work by the University of Manchester with Civil Service teams shows that people experience technostress when they are unable to adapt to or cope with information technologies in a healthy manner. They feel compulsive about being connected and sharing constant updates, feel forced to respond to work-related information in real-time, and engage in almost habitual multi-tasking. They feel compelled to work faster because information flows faster and have little time to spend on sustained thinking and creative analysis.

# What is Technostress?



Technostress can cause people to feel overloaded, perhaps through the volume of emails they receive, and the belief that they should respond immediately to electronic messages at the expense of more considered work.

Technostress also leads to a sense of 'Techno-invasion'. This describes a feeling of being "always exposed" because people can potentially be reached anywhere and anytime and feel the need to be constantly connected. The regular work-day is extended, office work is done at all sorts of hours, and it is almost impossible to switch off - literally and mentally.



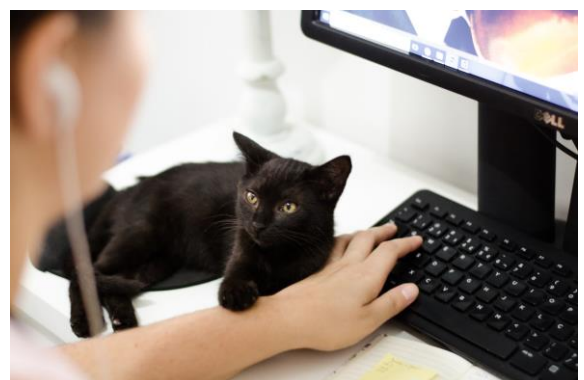
During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) period people may also experience technostress when IT equipment goes wrong and cannot be quickly fixed, or through a lack of expertise with software and hardware that would usually be fixed by speaking to a nearby colleague.

The following recommendations are just some ideas to try – they are not a one-size-fits-all solution.

# Best practice

## Set clear boundaries

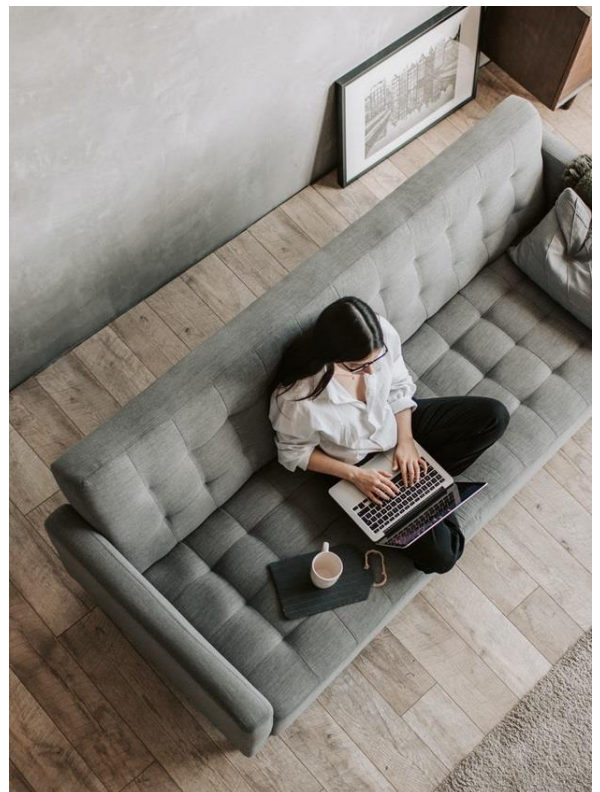
- Turn off notifications.
- Individuals should agree clear expectations with their line manager or chain of command and work colleagues for when they will and when they will not be on line.
- Remember the advice from Defence Digital: '[Connect – Get – Disconnect](#)'. This helps to make sure that the MODNET system doesn't get overloaded.
- Use Flexible Working Signatures (for example *"My working patterns sometimes mean that I choose to send and reply to emails outside normal working hours. There is no expectation for you to respond until you are next at work."*)
- Agree a standardised format for subject lines which makes it clear what is needed and by when (i.e. for info/action + response expected + deadline).
- Set clear and realistic deadlines for response, both to ease pressure and create time for a considered response.



# Best practice

## Role model new approaches

- Store emails as drafts and send them during normal working hours.
- Role model good behaviours by 'switching off' yourself.
- Provide support to build understanding of the dangers of being 'always on' and the risk to mental health, sleep, performance and burnout.
- Reduce the number of emails by using other routes for less formal communications, such as instant messaging or WhatsApp.
- Use comms channels to send the same message to groups of people at the same time rather than individually.
- Create an understanding for the time it takes to deal with emails. For example, have clear protocols in place on responding to emails and how this may not be possible outside of an employee's normal working hours.
- Limit the amount of people that can be copied into an email.



# Best practice

## Do you need to send it?

- Stop “Thank you” & “Cheers” Emails, especially when you ‘reply to all’ (It is not rude, but practical).
- Think before you send. Would a phone call be better? Do you have to send it now?
- Be attentive to tone and re-read before you press send. Words matter and the speed with which we draft and respond to emails can lead to inappropriate, uncivil language.

## Further resources



### Managing email

[ESRC Digital Futures](#) – this is a helpful YouTube video on managing email



### ACAS Report

[This report from ACAS](#) contains more advice on managing email effectively at work.