

# Does technology threaten our children's health?

## ■ Brain cancer

**Concern:** Fears were stoked in May when the World Health Organization declared the microwave-level radiation emitted by cellphones a "possible carcinogenic." Other medical authorities say there is no evidence of a direct causal link to brain cancer.

**Advice:** If you want to be on the safe side, consider buying a head set rather than having your child hold the phone up to his ear – and next to his brain.



## ■ Hearing loss

**Concern:** An estimated 12.5 percent of children age 6 to 19 suffer from noise-induced hearing loss.

**Advice:** The Children's Hearing Institute recommends a time limit of one hour a day with the volume of headphones set to 60 percent of the device's maximum level. If children listen for longer periods, the volume level should be much lower and never turned up to drown out surrounding noise.



## ■ Eye strain

**Concern:** Staring at a screen for too long hasn't been shown to cause permanent eye damage, but it can tire and dry out the eyes.



**Advice:** Rest and saline drops can be the cure. Prevention techniques recommended by the American Academy of Ophthalmology are to remain at least 25 inches from the screen and to reduce the brightness level of the screen

and make sure there's enough light in the room. Also remember to make yourself blink and to take a break from the screen every 20 minutes to look at something at least 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds – what's called the 20-20-20 rule.

## ■ Blackberry thumb

**Concern:** The umbrella medical term is repetitive stress injury, and there are a variety of ways the hands and the digits can be taxed by overuse of technology.

**Advice:** Pain is the first indicator of a problem so if you feel any in the fingers and hands, stop texting or typing. Experts recommend taking frequent breaks, sitting in an ergonomically correct position and trying to hold the device with a "neutral grip," meaning the wrist is straight and not bent too strongly in one direction.

GRAPHIC BY JERRY LUCIANI/STAFF ARTIST

## ■ Infertility

**Concern:** There has been some early study of the claim that boys and men who carry cellphones in their pockets run the risk of exposing their sperm to radiation that decreases its viability and motility. But none of the major health authorities have considered the evidence conclusive.

**Advice:** If you're worried, tell your son to keep the phone turned off if he carries it in his pocket, which reduces the amount of radiation emitted. Or keep it in the backpack.

— Colleen Diskin

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days listening to headphones set at a deafening volume, squinting at tiny, overly bright screens, or running fingers across a

next to their ear, or can a young boy become sterile by carrying it in his pants pocket day after day? Will our generation of dig-