

# 'Screen apnea', a symptom many people experience when sitting in front of a computer

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Former Microsoft CEO Linda Stone realized that every time she sat down at her laptop and opened her inbox, she found her breathing very shallow and almost holding her breath. This worries Linda Stone because she practices breathing every morning.

So Ms. Stone then conducted her own informal research. She invited 200 relatives to her home, let them check their emails on the computer and monitored their heart and breathing rates.

As a result, she noted that when viewing emails, about 80% of participants frequently stopped breathing or had changes in breathing. She described her findings in an article in Huffington Post magazine and named the phenomenon 'email apnea'.

Ms. Stone later renamed it 'screen apnea' to refer to the breathing difficulty many people experience when performing all types of work in front of a computer screen.

## Scientific explanation

As explained by Stephen Porges, a professor of psychiatry at the University of North Carolina who specializes in the nervous system, "screen apnea" is a manifestation of the human body's stress response.

When faced with any type of stimulus, our nervous system focuses on finding out whether it is a threat or not. This requires great mental effort, and then to 'calm down' the body a series of physiological changes including shallower breathing and a slowing of the heart rate will take place.

Although these reflexes are sometimes not harmful. But if they are 'on' all day, every day and it shifts the 'nervous system into a chronic threat state' then it becomes a problem.

Dr. David Spiegel, director of the Center for Stress and Health at Stanford Medicine, recommends that one of the causes of screen apnea is sitting in front of a computer screen for too long.

## How to fix?

According to Mr. Nestor, you must first be aware of your condition to be able to escape it, by checking yourself to see if you are breathing through your mouth (often a sign of shallow breathing).

If you find yourself breathing shallowly, take a deep breath and sigh out loud for a quick and easy way to reset your breathing pattern and improve your mood.

The larger the screen, the less mental stress it causes, according to Dr. Porges. So try to work on your computer screen instead of your phone.

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