

Smartphones nearby make us less intelligent

By Cara McGoogan and James Titcomb

IN THE digital age we are surrounded by a myriad distractions, from mobile apps to instant messaging. Now scientists have discovered it is not only reducing our attention span - it is also making us stupid.

Researchers at the University of Texas found the constant presence of a mobile phone has a "brain drain" effect that significantly reduces intelligence.

They discovered people

have immense potential to improve welfare, their persistent presence may come at a cognitive cost," said Dr Adrian Ward, the lead author of the study.

"Even when people are successful at maintaining sustained attention - avoiding the temptation to check their phone - the presence of these devices reduces available cognitive capability."

The researchers tested 520 university students on their memory and intelligence when in the presence of a smartphone.

Participants were told to complete tests in maths, memory and reasoning with their smartphones either on the desk, in their bag or pocket, or in another room, and with alerts turned off.

Those who had their phones on the desk recorded a 10 per cent lower score than those who left them in another room on operational span tasks, which measure working memory and focus. Those who kept their phones out of sight in pockets or bags scored slightly better than when they were placed on desks.

Similar research has previously showed smartphones can have a "butterfly brain effect" on users that can cause mental blunders.

520

Number of students tested on their intelligence and memory with their smartphone nearby

were worse at conducting tasks and remembering information if they have a smartphone to hand.

In two experiments, participants scored significantly worse if phones were on a desk or even in a pocket or bag. The effect occurred even if phones were switched off, and was even worse for those deemed dependent on their mobiles.

"Although these devices

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