



Dealing with a new normal in our digital reality

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THE FUTURE

Introduction

It's no surprise that after the year we had, stress levels are high. Stress is one of the top health issues facing Americans and Canadians today, with sources of stress ranging from money issues, to job challenges, to family problems and more. In fact, according to the American Psychological Association, [78% of adults in America reported](#) the Covid pandemic as a significant source of stress in their lives.

Since 2018, Kaspersky has been researching how the impact of cybersecurity issues have been impacting stress levels in adults from both the U.S. and Canada. With the pandemic causing people to spend more time online, with [reports showing](#) an increase of almost two hours a day compared to before the lockdown. We wanted to revisit the subject and see how spending more time online and relying on the internet to do so many more things in our day-to-day lives, has effected stress levels caused by cybersecurity related situations.

In April 2019, Kaspersky released "[Cyber-Stress, Refreshed](#)", a follow up study to "[The State of Cyber-Stress](#)." Both of these reports examined stress levels among consumers in the U.S. and Canada. The research findings showed that the news of a data breach caused 69% of respondents stress. Compared to previous surveys, this percentage was the same in 2019 (68%) and a 7% decrease from the survey in 2018 (76%). This may be due to the fact that less people considered themselves to have a beginner or basic level of knowledgeable about cybersecurity than in years past.

While people feel more educated about cybersecurity, we revisited Cyber-Stress report to see if there are any new causes of cybersecurity-related stress, where people are spending their time online, who is feeling the most cyber-stress and how the pandemic has changed things.

Key findings from the study include

- News of a data breach caused 69% of respondents stress. Compared to previous surveys, this percentage was the same in 2019 (68%) and a 7% **decrease** from the survey in 2018 (76%).
- Overall, the majority of people increased their online usage during the pandemic. Nearly 3 in 5 (57%) respondents increased their use of online services, with over a quarter (27%) saying it has significantly increased.
- Of those whose usage did increase over the past year, over a third (36%) of respondents feel more prepared to protect their digital life, while only 23% of people feel less prepared.
- Respondents found several online activities to help reduce stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over half (53%) watched television, a third (32%) found online workouts to be helpful, and 14% used meditation applications.
- Only 17% of respondents consider themselves to have expert or advanced cybersecurity knowledge, and 46% said they would classify themselves as a beginner or have basic knowledge in terms of understanding cybersecurity, a number that decreased from 52% in 2019.
- 56% of respondents said they use a PIN or password to protect their mobile devices.

Research Methodology

The quantitative study was conducted by research firm Opinion Matters, via an online survey in July 2021 of 2,500 adults (aged 18 or older) in the United States and Canada who go online.

Research Findings

How the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted online use

It is no surprise that with the closing of many businesses, and lockdowns in place that many people turned to the internet as a form of entertainment, a means of work and a solution to getting things done that could no longer be done in-person. As a result the majority of people increased their online usage during the pandemic.

Nearly **three in five** respondents increased their use of online services, with over **a quarter (27%)** saying it has significantly increased.

However, the increase in use was not spread equally among respondents, with 64% of Millennials saying their online usage increased and only 45% of Baby Boomers spending more time online. Of all respondents in North America only 7% respondents decreased their use of online services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For some, having to be online so often has become a cause of stress. 56% said 'yes, often' and 'yes, sometimes' when asked in this study.

The increase of usage also seemed to pair with an increase of confidence about how to maintain safe online. Of those whose usage did increase over the past year, over a third (36%) of respondents feel more prepared to protect their digital life, while only 23% of people feel less prepared. Almost half (48%) of Millennials surveyed feel more prepared, compared to the 27% of Gen X. Almost half of men who were surveyed (49%) feel as though they are more prepared or equally prepared to protect their digital life as a result of their increase in usage of online services, compared to less than a third (29%) of woman surveyed feeling the same. Regardless, it seems as though with the increased use of online services, survey participants feel more able to protect their digital life.

48%

Almost half of millennials surveyed feel more prepared, compared to the 27% of Gen X.

As a result of the lockdown restrictions, some of the services that increased use over the past year were using the internet to shop for household items with over half of respondents (53%) turning to online resources, 36% of people moved online for grocery shopping and 23% of people participating in virtual gatherings. Again, not all age groups took advantage of the same provisions with over a fifth (22%) of Gen Z and Millennials using online services as a means to relax, a number that drops to 15% when asking Gen X respondents.



The Stressful State of Cybersecurity

Even though people are feeling more confident about their ability to protect their digital lives, survey data shows that they are also feeling stress in relation to top concerns within cybersecurity.

Nearly **seven in ten** of respondents (**69%**) said that in relation to cybersecurity, news of data breaches caused them stress.

These stress levels were nearly identical between Americans and Canadians. When we asked this question in 2018, three quarters of respondents said news of data breaches caused them stress. This number dropped in 2019 to 68%, however since then, the number has barely changed (69%).

News of ransomware attacks has been widespread within the last year, with major attacks like the Colonial Pipeline attack covered in the news, and a new spike in attacks on schools. As such, 64% of respondents stated that news of ransomware attacks causes them stress.

Cybersecurity incidents seem to be among one of the more stressful situations that we face in our modern lives. About two thirds of respondents (64%) said having their bank account compromised would cause them the most stress – more stressful than losing their job (37%). In 2019, our research paints a different story with 46% of respondents finding losing their job among the most stressful situation.

Along with cybersecurity incidents causing stress, four in ten participants said losing their mobile phone would cause them the most stress a 5% increase from 2019. More respondents said losing their phone would be more stressful than being in a minor car accident (19%) or missing a flight (13%).

64%

Respondents stated that news of ransomware attacks causes them stress.

Awareness of cybersecurity

Unfortunately while many people feel more confident about their ability to protect their online lives, many still don't always fully understand how it works.

Only **17%** of respondents consider themselves to have expert or advanced cybersecurity knowledge, **46%** said they would classify themselves as a beginner or basic knowledge in terms of understanding cybersecurity, a number that decreased slightly from **52%** in 2019.

This again does not spread evenly over the generations as over a quarter (26%) of Millennial respondents said they have expert or advanced knowledge of cybersecurity, compared to the only 12% of Gen X who felt the same.

Even with many respondents considering themselves to have high levels of cybersecurity knowledge, still less than a quarter of respondents (30%) said they use a security solution on all of their devices to protect the personal information stored online or on their devices. Even with the majority of respondents unprotected, still just over half (56%) said they use a PIN or password on their mobile device to protect the personal information stored online or on their devices. This number has risen slightly since 2019 where only 52% of people used a PIN or password, but still has a ways to go.

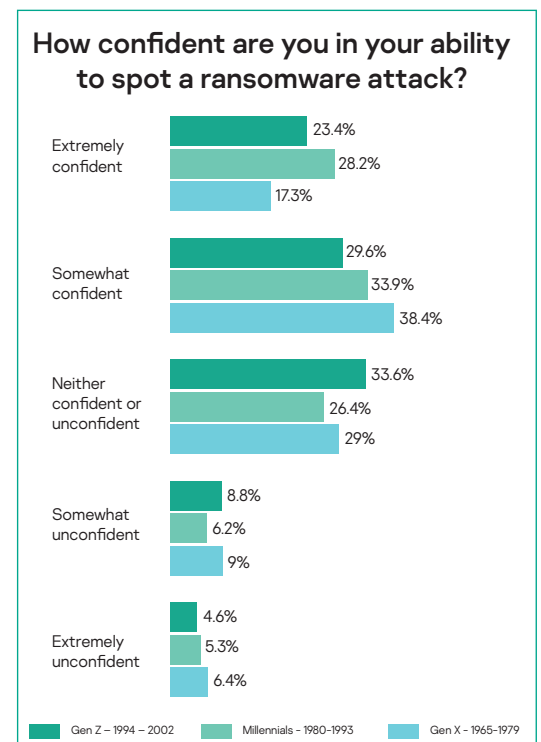
While many do not consider themselves an expert, many do feel confident in being able to spot a scam. Over half (56%) of respondents said they were confident in being able to spot a ransomware attack. Just under 7 in 10 (69%) of respondents are confident in being able to spot a malicious SMS text, and the same percentage (69%) are confident in spotting a spearphishing email.

However, even with the confidence at a higher level, cyberthreats are a reality for many, with almost half (48%) of all respondents having experienced some type of cybersecurity incident in the past 2 years. A number that jumped from 28% in 2019. In Canada 43% respondents said they have experienced any cybersecurity issue, whereas over half (54%) respondents in the US said the same.

As such, learning about cybersecurity incidents and catching attacks early is crucial. Currently less than half (48%) of respondents check their accounts for indicators that they have been compromised, and only 26% of respondents educate themselves about online privacy. While ignorance may be bliss, but more knowledge of cybersecurity threats and best practices will help you reduce the impact of a breach or cyberattack if you are inevitably faced with one.

48%

Currently less than half of respondents check their accounts for indicators that they have been compromised, and only 26% of respondents educate themselves about online privacy.





What people plan to do next








When asked, respondents who moved many of their tasks online, will continue to do so. Over half (51%) of female respondents plan to keep doing shopping for household/personal items online after COVID-19 pandemic restrictions lift, compared to over 2 in 5 (42%) male respondents who said the same. Along those lines, a quarter (25%) of Gen Z respondents said they would continue grocery shopping online, with that number increasing to over a third (34%) when surveying Millennials. Only 11% of respondents said they would continue online social gatherings, supporting the notion of people wanting to return to seeing friends and family in person.

While stress levels were high this past year, respondents did find several online activities to help reduce stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over half (53%) found watching television to reduce stress, **a third (32%)** found online workouts to be helpful, and **14%** used meditation applications to reduce stress during this time.

Over half (51%) of Gen Z respondents have used social media to relax during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number that stays almost the same (49%) when talking about the next generation, Millennials. However, this number does drop to 37% when Gen X respondents were asked the same.

What kind of apps would you trust the least with your data?

 # HASH	Social networking apps	28%
	Dating/New friend apps	25%
	There is no particular kind of app I would trust my data with the least	20%
	Gaming apps	17%
	Banking/finance apps	16%
	Mobile payment apps	15%
	Video, music, live stream apps (like Tik Tok)	14%
	Messaging apps	11%
	Video chat apps	11%
	Ride-sharing apps	10%



While there is an increasing amount of malware, spam and overall cybersecurity incidents impacting millions of North Americans each year, by taking simple steps to learn how to protect yourself you can not only reduce the probability of an incident happening to you, but you can also reduce the amount of cyber-stress impacting your life. Here are a few tips Kaspersky recommends to proactively maintain a secure digital life, to help avoid becoming the next victim of a cyberattack:

- **Use strong passwords that are unique for every account.** Find a system that works for you to help you to come up with a different secure password for every online account. This could be storing login information in a password manager, or using a word association technique like the one [recommended by Kaspersky experts](#) for creating passphrases.
- **Secure your device with a PIN or password.** A [surprising number](#) of people do not lock down their smartphones with a simple PIN or password. This can help to protect your personal information from outsiders if your device is lost or stolen.
- **Use a VPN when connecting to public Wi-Fi.** A VPN can encrypt all data sent over public Wi-Fi, ensuring that third parties cannot view or intercept your personal information. For those that are often using devices on the go, in airports, coffee shops or hotels, a VPN is a must-have.
- **Consider a security solution that can protect your personal data.** Less than a quarter of people (24%) use a security solution on all of their devices. Reliable security software can protect you from malware, ransomware, phishing, spam and more, while also offering features that can enhance your online life, like a password manager and parental control components.
- **Learn about cybersecurity and online privacy.** Ignorance may be bliss, but more knowledge of cybersecurity threats and best practices will help you reduce the impact of a breach or cyberattack if you face one in the future. Here are some resources that can help you get started:
 - National Cyber Security Alliance: <https://staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/>
 - InfoSec Institute: <https://resources.infosecinstitute.com/>
 - FTC Consumer Information: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/>
 - Kaspersky Daily Blog: <https://www.kaspersky.com/blog/>
 - Kaspersky Resource Center: <https://usa.kaspersky.com/resource-center>

About Kaspersky

Kaspersky is a global cybersecurity and digital privacy company founded in 1997. Kaspersky's deep threat intelligence and security expertise is constantly transforming into innovative security solutions and services to protect businesses, critical infrastructure, governments and consumers around the globe. The company's comprehensive security portfolio includes leading endpoint protection and a number of specialized security solutions and services to fight sophisticated and evolving digital threats. Over 400 million users are protected by Kaspersky technologies and we help 240,000 corporate clients protect what matters most to them. Learn more at usa.kaspersky.com.

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