Seven tips for a healthier relationship with your phone

April 13 2023, by Paul Levy

No phones in the bedroom. Credit: pexels ketut subiyanto

How long do you spend staring at a screen every day? According to <u>one report</u>, the average person spends about seven hours a day on screens connected to the internet. And that figure is going to be even higher if

your job is mainly done in front of a computer.

Most of us over-use digital devices, spending too long either working or enjoying being distracted on phones, tablets, laptops or even VR headsets. We are accused of being addicted to tech and warned of the dangers to our physical and mental health.

One significant paradox here is that we often retreat into the digital world to escape the stresses of the physical world, but can end up simply collecting other kinds of digital and physical stress along the way.

As a parent, I became concerned a few years ago about the effect my digital life was having on my work and family. I did some research of my own, changed the way I used my devices and even wrote a book about the dangers of what I call the "digital inferno."

It's only in recent years that longer-term studies have been published on the issue. And taken together, these studies comprise a growing and significant body of knowledge, that is hard to dismiss or ignore: too much tech can cause issues for us humans.

To be clear, digital devices offer significant benefits—think connection, education, entertainment. The danger is when our overuse of them becomes toxic to our health.

From a personal perspective, eye strain, neck ache, poor sleep, stress, repetitive strain injuries of all kinds and impaired hand function are just a few of symptoms I've had over the years thanks to my overuse of screens and devices—and research shows I'm far from alone.

If any of these symptoms describe you (or anyone you know), or you just feel too much of your life is taken up with staring at a screen, then you might find my advice on how to regain control of your tech helpful.

How to regain control

1. Practice putting down your digital devices consciously

Keep them out of sight and put them away when you aren't using them, [especially at night](#). Banish them from the bedroom, get an [alarm clock](#) (so you aren't using your phone alarm) and you'll [sleep better](#) without the late-night scrolling. And get out of the habit of watching TV with your phone next to you. Just focus on one task at a time without the distraction of another screen.

2. Set yourself screen time limits

Too much screen time can give you [headaches](#). Be mindful of the way your use your tech and make use of features like voice notes, which allow you to stay up-to-date with communication without staring at a screen for a long time.

3. Stop allowing digital distractions

Constant interruption can [induce physical and mental stress](#). Turn off notifications and alerts when you want to fully focus on a task. And keep your phone off your desk. [Research shows](#) that having your phone nearby, even if it's not buzzing or ringing and even if the power is off, can hurt your performance.

4. Schedule proper digital-free time

[Depression and anxiety](#) is one result of digital overload. So getting away from your [digital world](#) for a while is [important](#). Take a walk in nature, read a book, go for a bike ride—anything that takes you away from the

screens for a while.

5. Make screens easier on the eyes

Screen overuse can strain our eyes and affect our eyesight. Don't squint at tiny screens to do work that would be better done on a larger-screen laptop. Reduce the blue light on devices and make use of all the other helpful accessibility features. Start with that screen glare. And also make sure the volume doesn't burst your ear drums.

6. Take control of the chaos of information overload

Organize your phone, computer and tablet so you can use them more efficiently. Some apps really do help you take charge of your life and work more calmly and effectively. Time-tracking apps measure how much time you're spending (wasting) on your screen—prepare to be horrified! We regain mastery over our digital devices when we become more proactive in their use.

7. Sit well when you are digitally engaged

Slouching over a phone or hunching over your laptop will harm your neck and your back. Sit upright, stretch regularly and exercise often—without your phone.

Be a digital decider

These seven tips should help you regain a sense of control over your digital life. For me, it's all about sleeping and waking better after leaving my phone downstairs. It's about having dedicated, planned digital time and specific times when the phone has no place in what I'm doing.

Yet it's also about enjoying these tech miracles in a more satisfying way and using them more consciously. I like to think of myself now as a digital decider and not just another digital casualty.

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