

Simple digital detox tips can curb phone addiction habits

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Do you have a smartphone addiction? Americans spend 23.6 hours a week online — a jump that's doubled since 2000. Credit: Illustration/Annemarie Grisen, iStock

Before you dismiss the idea that you might suffer from smartphone addiction, consider how long could you go without checking your phone. A day? An evening? An hour? Internet use has skyrocketed over the past few decades due to the proliferation of mobile devices. The convenience of checking social media updates, messaging friends, watching movies, paying bills and even finding dates right from our pockets has radically changed our lifestyle habits. Since 2000, the average number of hours spent online each week has doubled to 23.6 hours, according to the 15th annual Digital Future Report, produced by the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future.

However, a 24-7 internet connection in the palm of your hand comes with a price. Numerous recent studies have linked [social media](#) to low self-esteem, sleep problems, anxiety and depression. USC experts have even linked internet and smartphone addiction with changes in your brain: Swiping on an app delivers a pleasurable dopamine hit in the same area of your brain

activated by cocaine and other addictive drugs. Additionally, half of U.S. teens report feeling addicted to their [mobile devices](#), according to a 2017 USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism study. And it's not just millennials who feel the effects of smartphone addiction: 27 percent of parents report feeling addicted themselves.

If you're worried that your relationship to your smartphone and social media is unhealthy—or suspect it to be becoming so—try these tips for a digital detox.

Pay attention to your emotions when you check your phone

Mindfulness, a meditation practice of bringing one's attention to the present in a non-judgemental way, is one way to explore and question your relationship to technology, according to Allen Weiss, who is director of the Mindful USC initiative and a professor of marketing at the USC Marshall School of Business. With more than a decade of experience in mindful meditation, Weiss offers this exercise from one of his courses: Ask yourself what is going on internally when you feel the need to check your phone. Don't just go into autopilot, but consider: Is it a need to avoid a sense of boredom, a difficult emotion, or the feeling of being left out? Do certain actions, like checking your email or social media, make you feel better or worse?

"Since mindfulness helps people process these emotions, I wanted [my students] to fully experience the sense of these emotions and see how they arise and pass away," Weiss said. This helps people to fully explore the needs they have and whether these devices are really helping them or not.

Schedule your time to avoid smartphone addiction

"Now we can do so much online—a lot of our daily lives are on our phone," said Steven Sussman, professor of preventive medicine, psychology and social work. But there are ways to wean yourself from obsessively checking your phone and developing a smartphone addiction.

Provided by University of Southern California

He suggests creating a schedule with times blocked out to use certain websites or apps, or limiting how many times you check your phone to once every 15 minutes, then once every 30 minutes, and so on.

One easy rule is to not use phones during meal times, according to Julie Albright, a psychology lecturer at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and author of the forthcoming book [*Left to Their Own Devices: How Digital Natives are Reshaping the American Dream*](#). "Keeping them out of sight during family dinners lets you focus on the people around you and be present," she said.

Use an app to increase your awareness of your internet usage

If tracking your usage is too difficult, you could add apps to your phone to provide you with useful feedback and limitations, Sussman said.

One to try is [Onward](#), which aims to reduce smartphone addiction by limiting access to specific apps and browsers, automatically tracking and reporting your overuse behavior and offering personalized coaching to help you hit your goals. Another, [AppDetox](#), lets you set limits on the time you spend inside individual apps and sends you a notification once your allowed usage is up.

Recharge your phone in another room

Perhaps limiting your phone use during the day sounds too impractical. You can still make a small but impactful change at bedtime: Charge your [phone](#) in another room, suggests Albright.

"This is a way to reconnect with body, mind, and self and not be in constant state of overstimulation of the mind," Albright said. "We all need that quiet time to be able to think again and refocus."

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