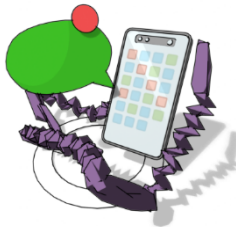


Think Well, Be Well

Provided by Lawley

Embracing a Digital Detox

Technology has become such an integral part of life that it may be hard to imagine functioning without it. Beyond work, people depend on technological devices for information, communication and entertainment. However, constant attachment to these devices can have harmful effects on your mental health. To combat these issues, you may consider a digital detox. The National Institutes of Health defines “digital detox” as a disconnection from devices or social media for a defined duration.



A survey by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that constant digital connectivity is linked to higher stress levels, with nearly 1 in 5 (18%) adults identifying technology use as a major stressor in their lives.

This article explores the effects of heavy technology use on mental health and offers practical tips for effective screen time management with digital detoxing.

The Impact of Technology on Mental Health

Many people are hooked on tech gadgets for a reason. Checking these devices stimulates the brain’s reward system, causing the body to release dopamine, the pleasure hormone. However, these pleasurable activities can become addictive. Excessive screen time has also been linked to mood swings, suicidal tendencies, and increased stress and anxiety.

Studies suggest that excessive use of digital devices can have detrimental effects on mental health. For example, checking social media in bed at night has been [found](#) to increase the likelihood of anxiety and insomnia. [Research](#) also suggests that frequent technology use can lead to feelings of isolation, difficulty focusing, tech addiction and slower brain development.

Consider unplugging if you’re experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Increased anxiety
- Increased anger or irritability
- Depression

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- Poor sleep quality
- Feelings of insecurity
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dependence on validation from social media
- Fear of missing out

Benefits of a Digital Detox

Taking a break from digital devices is crucial to maintain balance and overall well-being. It helps reduce stress and improves sleep quality. When you step away from technology, you become fully present for yourself and for others, allowing for more meaningful social connections. Furthermore, digital detoxing has significant mental health benefits. Studies show that people who refrained from social media reported lower stress levels and improved self-image. Additionally, taking a technology timeout allows you to be mindful of your online habits and form healthier routines, ultimately leading to higher productivity.

Simple Strategies for Digital Detoxing

The APA survey also revealed that while 65% of Americans agree that occasionally unplugging or taking a digital detox is important for mental health, only 28% actually do so. Begin your digital detox by determining which behaviors you'd like to address and creating a plan that works for you. Try these strategies for an effective digital detox:

- **Turn off notifications.** Notifications are distracting and can hinder productivity. Consider turning off as many as you can to minimize interruptions.
- **Use digital detox tools.** Plenty of devices have built-in tools that can silence notifications or disable apps for a certain period. Research shows that those who use digital detox tools (e.g., iOS Screen Time or Google Play's Digital Wellbeing) are less apt to use their smartphones compulsively and, thus, more likely to avoid the negative effects of social media.
- **Start your day tech-free.** Many people pick up their phones and start scrolling the moment they wake up, but Stanford Lifestyle Medicine Program experts say this behavior activates the fight-or-flight response. This not only creates a sense of anxiety but also conditions the brain to be more hypervigilant. Instead, use the first hour of the day for activities such as exercising, spending time outside or preparing a healthy breakfast. The goal is to create a morning routine that sets a positive tone for the day and supports brain health.
- **Take periodic breaks from technology.** Eliminating the use of all digital devices may not be realistic, especially if you use them for work. Instead, set limits for how much time you spend on social media each day or designate certain times for phone use. You can also consider ways to make small changes, such as chatting with someone face-to-face rather than using your phone.

- **Create gadget-free zones.** Designate specific areas in your home, such as dining rooms and bedrooms, where gadgets are not allowed. This allows you to be more present and encourages tech-free activities, such as baking, reading, doing crafts, and playing cards or board games.
- **Reach out for support.** Family and friends can offer emotional support during your digital detox. They can hold you accountable and keep you motivated when you're struggling to stick to your goals.

Conclusion

While technological devices aren't inherently harmful, overuse can negatively affect your physical and mental well-being. With a digital detox, you can break unhealthy habits and embrace more balanced, healthier alternatives.

Contact a mental health professional for further guidance.