

# DIGITAL DETOX

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **VARIABLE**



## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

We all spend a lot of time in front of our screens. Though society seems to be preoccupied with screen time in children, parents, on average, spend **more than seven hours a day** in front of a screen *outside* of work! In addition, most of us carry our smartphones with us all the time. When they are not pinging and buzzing with notifications, we often distract ourselves by habitually checking them—sometimes hundreds of times a day.

Both our time and attention are limited resources. The purpose of the Digital Detox practice is to help us reclaim some of our time and attention so that we can use those precious resources for activities that make us happier—from achieving our professional goals to practicing self-care to spending quality time with family and friends. Eliminating the habit of constantly monitoring our devices makes more space for happiness.

Research suggests that implementing regular Digital Detox practices can help you feel happier, as well as less stressed, depressed, and lonely.

## TIME REQUIRED

It only takes a few minutes to reflect on your digital media use and set up some boundaries for yourself—and then, by doing a Digital Detox, you should actually get back extra time in your day. Research finds that the practice might be more effective if you do it for at least a week.

## HOW TO DO IT

What is a Digital Detox? In the extreme, taking a Digital Detox means completely refraining from using any digital devices (including mobile phones, tablets, and laptops)—in some cases, for a week or more. But digital devices play such an important role in our personal and professional lives that a complete Digital Detox is impractical for most of us. Luckily, research suggests that more targeted Digital Detox practices—intentional and voluntary breaks from digital devices or apps—may be equally or even more effective.

The key to practicing Digital Detox is to choose something that you can do *intentionally*, *voluntarily*, and *consistently*. Here are several suggestions based on existing research:

1. **Take a daily break.** Choose certain times of the day when you will avoid digital screens. For example, leave your phone out of sight and in silent mode while in shared public spaces, at mealtimes, or during the last hour before going to sleep. It might help to close your laptop and have a place to put your phone that is secure but out of sight and out of reach.

An easy way to start is to step away from your digital devices for 30 minutes each day—whether that’s before bed, first thing in the morning, or during dinner with friends or family.

2. **Limit your mindless scrolling.** Another approach is to spend less time on apps that you tend to use a lot. Most people overuse certain social media apps, but everyone is different: For you, it may be a gaming app or YouTube. Consider limiting the amount of time you spend on your most-used app to 30 minutes or less a day.

Social media feeds are built to keep you scrolling, but you can set a daily time limit in most app settings. You can also use Screen Time on your iPhone or Digital Well-Being on your Android phone to set daily limits for specific apps.

3. **Resist the pull of notifications.** Our attention is limited and precious. Yet we let ourselves get pulled in to devices and apps by repeated alerts and notifications. Take control of your attention by limiting how often you get notifications or by silencing alerts. You can do this by simply turning on Do Not Disturb mode on your phone for a few hours a day. You can also turn your phone on silent and plan to check it only at specific times. Or if there is an app that you find particularly distracting, you can turn off its notifications, including the red badge that tells you how many new notifications you have.
4. **Create your own Digital Detox plan.** You can also decide on your own version of a Digital Detox that works for you.

Whatever you choose to do, be sure to specify your Digital Detox plan by typing or writing out your specific intentions about how and when you will engage in it.

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Fitz, N., Kushlev, K., Jagannathan, R., Lewis, T., Paliwal, D., & Ariely, D. (2019). [Batching smartphone notifications can improve well-being](#). *Computers in Human Behavior*, 101, 84–94.

In an experiment, participants who received their smartphone notifications in three daily batches (rather than in real time) felt happier and less stressed. However, not receiving notifications at all did make people experience higher anxiety and “fear of missing out (FOMO).”

Hughes, N., & Burke, J. (2018). [Sleeping with the frenemy: How restricting "bedroom use" of smartphones impacts happiness and wellbeing](#). *Computers in Human Behavior*, 85, 236–244.

In one experiment, half of the participants were instructed not to use their smartphones in the bedroom for one week, while the other half used their phones as they normally would. The participants who practiced Digital Detox in the bedroom felt happier at the end of the week.

Hunt M. G., Marx R., Lipson C., & Young J. (2018). [No more FOMO: Limiting social media decreases loneliness and depression](#). *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 37, 751–768.

In another experiment, researchers found that people who limited their use of social media for three weeks—to 10 minutes a day each for Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat—felt less lonely and depressed than people who didn’t.

## WHY TO TRY IT

Digital Detox works in several ways. First, by spending less time in front of a screen, we have more time for other activities that are essential for happiness: from sleep and exercise to connecting with family and friends to simply being present in the moment.

Second, the activities we’re already engaging in become more fulfilling without digital distractions. If you are talking to someone who is constantly checking their phone, you probably feel less happy and connected to them than if you had their full attention. [Research](#) suggests that the person using their phone during a social interaction is also missing out on the opportunity to connect with others.

Finally, scrolling through social media can sometimes make us feel bad about ourselves in comparison to what others are posting, which often presents an unrealistic picture of their lives.

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

