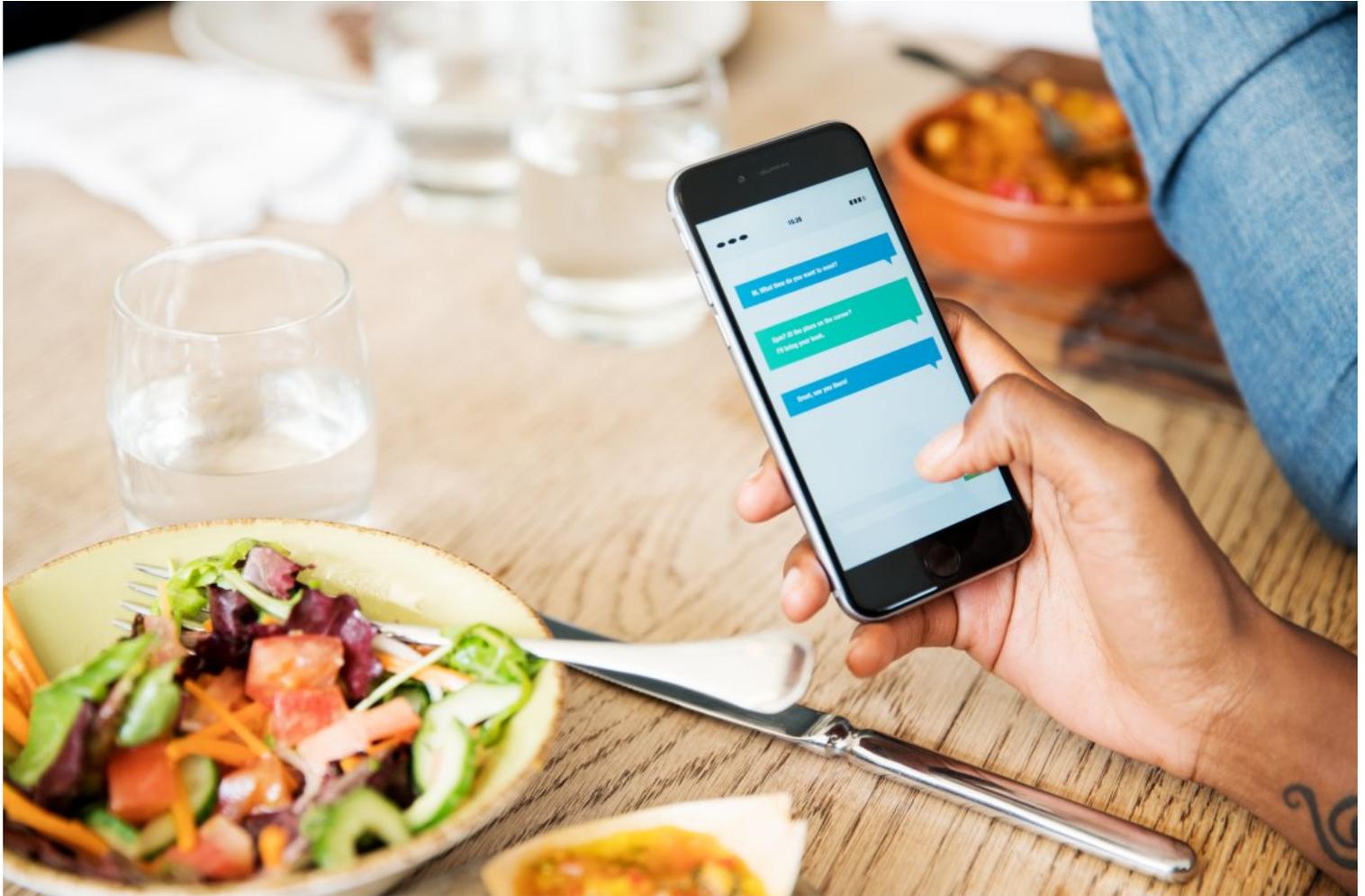


Smartphone Addiction: Steps to Use Phone Less

time.com/5139859/smartphone-addiction-solutions/



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“Every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything,” Steve Jobs said in 2007, when he introduced the first iPhone. Eleven years later, the question isn’t whether he was right. It’s whether we like the way we’ve changed.

Today, the average American checks his or her phone 47 times a day — many more if they’re younger — and spends about four hours a day staring at its screen. That’s roughly a sixth of our total time alive. Given these numbers, it makes sense that there’s an increasing sense of concern over our relationships with our phones. In January, two of Apple’s biggest shareholders wrote an open letter to Apple requesting that the company provide “more choices and tools” that can help parents set limits on their children’s phone time. In the same month, Facebook announced that it had overhauled the algorithms behind its news feed, to put more emphasis on “meaningful interactions” — i.e., posts from friends and family members, rather than brands. And February saw the launch of the Center for Humane Technology, a coalition of former tech employees who are alarmed about the impact of the technologies they helped create.

Phones, and our relationships with them, are on many peoples' minds. The question of whether to describe our obsessive phone behaviors as an "addiction" is controversial — but to get too wrapped up in semantics misses the point. An increasing number of us are concluding that, a decade after Jobs' proclamation, we don't like the way our phones have changed us. We feel busy but ineffective. Connected but lonely. The same technology that gives us so much freedom also acts like a leash — and the more tethered we become, the more it raises the question of who's actually in control.

I've spent the past two years researching and writing a book about how to create a healthy relationship with your phone without giving it up completely, drawing on research in neuroplasticity, mindfulness and the science behavior change. Here are nine of my top suggestions for changing your relationship with your phone.

Identify what you want your relationship with your phone to look like.

Many people start with a vague goal — "I want to spend less time on my phone" — without specifying what they're actually trying to change or accomplish, or identifying why they reach for their phones to begin with. Then they try to go cold turkey and feel discouraged and powerless when it doesn't work.

This is the equivalent of dumping someone because you want a "better relationship" but, when pressed, admitting that you actually have no idea what the better relationship would look like. If you don't take the time to figure that out, you are highly likely to end up in a relationship that is just as unsatisfying or unhealthy as the one that you just got out of.

So before you do anything else, ask yourself: What things do you do on your phone that make you feel good? Which activities make you feel bad? What behaviors or habits would you like to change?

Figure out how much time you're currently spending on your phone.

Install a time-tracking app such as Moment or (OFFTIME) that will gather data on how much time per day you spend on your phone and how often you pick it up. This information might be depressing at first — but it's a great way to track your progress and boost your motivation.

Identify some specific things you'd like to do with your reclaimed time.

If you use your phone less, you'll end up with more free time. Much of this will be in small chunks, such as when you're riding the elevator or waiting in line. These can be great opportunities to take a deep breath and just do nothing (which can be a surprisingly relaxing and restorative experience).

You're also likely to find yourself with longer periods of time to fill. In order to keep yourself from reverting to your phone to entertain you, it's essential that you decide on several activities you'd like to use this time for — and then set up your environment to make it more likely that you'll stick to these intentions. For example, if you say you want to read more, put a book on your coffee table so when you flop down on the couch at the end of a long day, your book will be within eyesight and reach. If you want to practice playing music, take your instrument out of its case and prop it up in the hall, where it'll be easy to grab when you have a few spare moments. If you want to spend more time with your family or a particular friend, make plans to do so — and put your phone in your pocket or bag for the duration of your time together.

Use apps to protect yourself from apps.

This may seem like a counterintuitive suggestion, but it's actually extremely effective. Apps such as Freedom (iOS), (OFFTIME) and Flipd allow you to block your access to pre-specified apps and websites. You can enable your app blocker when you're trying to focus at work, or you can set a schedule for which hours of the day you want to have access to games and other tempting apps. Some versions also allow you to schedule "block" sessions in advance — for example, you could lock yourself out of social media apps for two hours before bedtime — a great tool when you're trying to change a habit.

Create a reminder to check in with yourself.

A lot of times we find our phones in our hands without knowing how they got there — and then look up 30 minutes later wondering where the time has gone. To prevent these "zombie checks," create a speed bump for yourself — a small obstacle that forces you to slow down and decide whether you really want to be on your phone. Put a rubber band around it as a tactile prompt, something you have to physically move out of the way in order to get access, or set a lock screen image that reminds you to check in with yourself, asking questions like, "What for? Why now? What else?" (You can download free lock screen images on my website.)

Delete social media apps.

When it comes to time-sucking, social media apps are the worst. That's not surprising: They're designed to get us to spend as much time on them as possible. Why? Because it's profitable. Every minute we spend on social media is another opportunity to show us ads — ads that have been targeted using the detailed personal information that we have voluntarily shared. In other words, we aren't the customers on social media apps; advertisers are. And our attention is what's being sold.

This doesn't mean you can't use social media if you really want to. But if your goal is to spend less time on your phone, consider limiting yourself to using social media only on your computer.

Set up a text auto-responder.

Many people hesitate to take breaks from their phone because the idea of taking too long to respond to text messages stresses them out. The solution? Set a text message auto-responder telling people that you're taking a break, and that you'll respond to them upon your return. If they have an urgent message, they'll know to find another way to reach you. This is an underutilized tool that makes a surprisingly big difference. Starting with iOS 11, Apple has a "Do Not Disturb While Driving" feature that can be customized for any situation (you should obviously use it while you're driving, too). Android users can use a third party app, such as LilSpace or SMS Auto-Reply Text Message.

Do all the other things you know you're supposed to do but haven't yet.

Create a charging station for your phone that you can't reach from your bed. Disable all notifications except for phone calls, messages and calendar events — you can always re-enable notifications one by one if you miss them; the point is to start with the bare minimum, emphasizing communication from real people trying to reach you directly. Redesign your home screen so that it only displays apps that are useful tools, with tempting time suckers (including email) buried in a folder on an interior screen. Get a

watch. Get an alarm clock that's not your phone, otherwise you're guaranteeing that your phone will be the first thing you reach for in the morning. Keep your phone off the table during meals and ask others to do the same.

Remember the goal.

One reason that our attempts to spend less time on our phones so often fail is that we frame our efforts in the same way we do diets: as acts of self-deprivation. And who likes feeling deprived? Instead, think of the goal in more positive terms: when we aim to cut back on phone time, we're trying to resolve discrepancies between how we say we want to live our lives, and how we're actually living. The closer we get, the happier we'll be.