DIGITAL DISCONNECT

5 Steps to Take Back Control of Your Devices

Introduction

It is becoming very challenging to put the phone down. Not only are most people working in front of a screen all day, but most do it at home too. Several people go home after work and sit in front of the TV and browse their phone.

We live a digitalized life. Over 80% of the population owns a mobile device, and 57% of them have more than one type of device. Our digital world is a simple escape of our reality, and it comes at a cost. The impact on our brain, body, and behavior can be very significant in one's life and ruin relationships with people we love. Not only are our electronic devices connected to the internet, but it is also in our car, the fridge, our watch, our games, and even our home. This omnipresence of technology begs the question, how can we free ourselves from an addiction to the digital world?

Here's a short survey that will give you an idea of your relationship with technology. While this is not a scientific survey, it gives you an idea of your relationship with the digital world.

	YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW
Do you sleep with your phone next to your bed?			
Do you look at social media an hour or less before bed?			
Is it hard for you to sit in silence (ex: on your commute or in a car)?			
Do you eat most of your meals in front of a screen?			
Do you use your phone as an alarm?			
Do you check social media while you are at work?			
Do you usually check your phone as soon as there is a notification?			
Do you turn on the TV when you come home from work?			
Do you have a smartwatch?			
Would you say that your daily screen time is more than 5 hours a day?			
Is looking at your phone an automatic behavior that you don't always do consciously?			

	YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW
Do you have a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep?			
Do you struggle with weight?			
Do you have difficulty with your attention or concentration?			
Do you check your phone or browse social media when you drive?			
Do you sometimes feel like your phone vibrate, and yet there are no notifications?			
Do you feel anxious if you forget your phone or don't have access to it for a while?			
Does it irritate you when people tell you that you are not listening or paying attention to them while they speak to you?			
Would you consider your electronic devices as your most valuable belongings, something you could not live without?			
TOTALS	**YES**	**NO**	**I DON'T KNOW**

Now calculate the totals, what do you notice?

Mostly NO: Great, that means that you have found a spot in your life where you use devices and, they don't use you and admittedly don't govern your life.

Mostly YES: This is a sign that this guide is for you. Your life seems to be influenced a lot by your screen time; you might be losing a lot of time and energy on devices that don't fulfill you. Besides, if you said "yes" to almost all the questions, you are likely an artist at escaping reality. It might be time for you to take control of your life. It won't be easy to unplug, but with determination and patience, you will get there!

Mostly I DON'T KNOW: This is not necessarily a good thing. You might be in denial and unable to be aware of your behavior. This guide will help you be more conscious of your habits and how you can live a more fulfilling life.

Whether you want to completely break up with social media or develop a healthier relationship with technology, the following five steps are here to help you positively change your behaviors.

Step 1: Identifying a Motivation

When we want to make a change in our life, we need to identify a reason to help us sustain the change. The best reasons are the ones that are close to our hearts as opposed to imposed by others. You can identify your motivations by finding answers to the following question:

Why do I want to disconnect from the digital world? What are the benefits to disconnect from the digital world?

Write down all the reasons that come to mind.

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Make sure that you feel connected to personal reasons such as "to have more energy and time with people I love," as opposed to extrinsic motivations like "because my partner or friends said so."

Step 2: Being Ready to Change

Once you've listed your motivations, ask yourself:

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not motivated, 10 being highly motivated), how motivated are you to disconnect from the digital world?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If your score is under 5, it might not be the right time for you. You have an opportunity to reconsider your motivation and also the timing. A score above 6 is more likely going to lead you to success.

If your answer was below 10, what would help you move one score higher? In other words, what would make you more motivated to change?

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What do you perceive as a benefit to disconnect?

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Step 3: Monitor Your Screen Time

It is important to monitor your screen time so that you can be aware of how much time you spend in front of a screen and how much you want that to be reduced. Increasing our awareness of how we use technology is key to succeeding in adopting healthier behaviors.

Not only are we more likely to change our habits, but we are also more likely to change our life by being in control of our screen time. You can download an app that will calculate that for your phone and make sure to take note of screen time on other devices like TV or computers.

Your goal will be to see a reduction in screen time over the course of the next weeks. Every morning, you can note your screen time of the previous day
and aim to reduce it.

Step 4: Identifying Actions

The next step is dedicated to actions. Make a list of the things you could do to help you reduce your time in the digital world. Here are a few examples:

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness doesn't have to be a complex meditation practice. It can be a simple exercise of taking a moment to connect with your breath by taking three deep breaths. Mindfulness is the act of observing our experience in the present moment. Using the five senses is a great way to practice mindfulness. Observe what you smell, see, hear, feel, or taste. Using your senses will bring you in the present moment.

Do One Thing at a Time

Our society tends to encourage multitasking. On the other hand, it has created individuals who have a hard time being present. If you are spending time with a friend, be present, listen, and interact with the individual. Turn off your notifications on your phone and keep eye contact with the person who is interacting with you.

Train Your Mind

It is possible to train your mind to focus on the present. You can do so by recognizing when you are thinking of the past or the future. Choose a day or an hour when you will observe your thoughts. During that time, catch yourself when you are having thoughts connected to something outside of the present moment. Like thinking of what happened in your past or hoping for the future. Once you caught yourself, take three deep breaths to bring your attention back to the present moment. That way, you will get better at bringing your mind back to the present.

Enjoy Your Meals

Many people have learned to eat in front of the screen. Unplugging while you eat, allow you to be present and enjoy the food that you eat. Every bite you take, force yourself to place

your utensils on the table, and taste your food. Observe the texture, the taste, and be mindful of every bite you take.

Have a Bedtime Ritual

When you go to bed, instead of scrolling down posts on social media, take 15 minutes to acknowledge what you are grateful for in the present moment. List all the things that at this moment you are thankful for.

Assign Offline Time

Many people do not have limits or boundaries when it comes to social media. Setting healthy boundaries is essential to improve our relationship with Facebook or Instagram. You can do so by identifying a specific time when you are offline, a time when you believe it is best not to look at social media.

For example, you could decide that the first two hours of your day are offline. That way, you don't have to let social media influence the mood you are in that day. It may take some days to adapt, and don't forget, research says that it takes 21 days to form a habit.

Put Your Phone Aside

When you are interacting with other people, whether it's at a family dinner or hanging out with friends, make a point to put your phone away. Social Media can quickly pull you into a rabbit hole where you will completely forget your surroundings and realize that you are not enjoying the present moment with people in your circle. Putting your phone aside will increase the quality of interaction you have with others and also bring more enjoyment.

Clean Up Your Feed

It is incredible the roller coaster of emotions that social media can lead you in. Take the time to be aware of how you feel when you see or read a post.

Make a point to unfollow any individuals that make you feel bad. You have the right to choose what you want to see, and that is an important decision that could change your relationship with social media to be more positive and empowering.

Practice Emotional Awareness

Practicing emotional awareness means paying attention to your emotions while looking at social media. Every time you catch yourself feeling down. Take a screen time timeout of one minute. During that minute, focus on your breathing. Take six deep breaths every time you have a negative emotion.

The key to success is to identify ways that are realistic and practical for you. It doesn't have to be an all or nothing approach. Slowly reducing your time in front of a screen, will allow you to get more comfortable with reality.
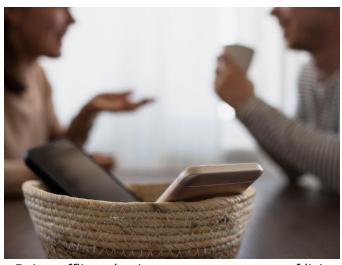
Step 5: Implement Your Actions

Now it is time to implement all the actions that you've identified in step 4.

Choose a day this week when you will apply your first action. That day will be the beginning of your journey to take back control of your devices. Once you've chosen a date, pick your action!

Awareness and transferring your activities to be more offline than in front of the screen can improve your well-being. Being offline also increases your sense of living in the present moment. Experiencing your reality can be more rewarding than the digital world.

Our relationship with technology doesn't have to be non-existent, but we have to find a balance. Being in control means that technology is not using you. Don't let all your energy and time go to waste on browsing social media. It is recommended to continue to monitor your screen time; awareness will be essential to maintain a balanced and healthy relationship with technology. Not only will you be able to regain a life that is fulfilling, and you will also set an excellent example for others to follow.