

12 WAYS TO GET UNPLUGGED

CAN'T SLEEP WITHOUT YOUR PHONE NEXT TO YOU? IN AN
EXTRACT FROM HER NEW BOOK, *ORIANNA FIELDING*
EXPLAINS HOW TO LIVE MINDFULLY IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Are you “on” 24/7? If so, the chances are technology is disconnecting you from real life. Studies have shown that digital overconnectivity can cause symptoms of depression and anxiety, thanks to the lack of human connection. Without real meaning, our lives have no anchor, no core to sustain us, and we are often left with no time to spend with ourselves. We have embraced digital tools as a way to live life virtually, instead of actually. Signs of a digital overload include checking your phone last thing at night and first thing in the morning, slipping away from activities to check it, bumping into things while looking at it, and struggling to focus and complete tasks without a sneaky peak. Sound familiar? For most of us, it's time for a digital detox. As Randi Zuckerberg, the former Facebook chief marketing officer and sister of the company's founder, Mark, says: “We own our devices, they don't own us.”

HOW MY PHONE STOPPED MY SEX LIFE

My wife put our daughter to bed, brushed her teeth and freshened up before bed. Slipping under the covers, we exchanged glances and knew it was time to do what comes naturally for a couple. We began to caress lovingly – but not each other. She began to fondle her mobile, while I tenderly stroked my iPad. Ooh, it felt so good.

Apparently, we weren't the only ones replacing foreplay with Facebook. According to a recent study, one-third of Americans would rather give up sex than lose their phones. Fortunately, my wife and I learnt how

to end our liaisons with gizmos and successfully reclaim our love life.

Our first step was to kill the cues. We realised we were part of the 65% of American adults who, according to the Pew Research Center, sleep with their phones on or next to their bed. Our mobiles were moved to the living room. Then, using a time switch, we set the internet router to shut off at 10pm nightly. We were making progress, but transgressions occasionally still happened, and likely always will. Researchers have found that even long after the behaviours of a habit are extinguished, the neural

pathways remain, making relapses still possible.

The deciding factor between falling off the wagon and containing a habit is resilience after failure. Dealing with a recurrence of an undesirable behaviour with self-compassion instead of self-loathing can make a big difference. But for now in the bedroom it's us and not our devices that are being turned on.

Nir Eyal, author of *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products* (CreateSpace £9)

KEY DUJITON

1 FOCUS YOUR PRIORITIES Find a quiet space, ideally sitting at a table with a pen and some paper (radical but necessary!), and focus fully on your life now. Imagine this is your last day. Write a list of the 10 key things you would want to do with your last day. Would you clear your inbox? Instagram that meal? Check Facebook? Or would you choose life: talking face to face with a loved one, being out and about enjoying nature, or visiting a favourite place?

2 IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS Write down what you would like to achieve during your digital detox to provide you with an incentive to continue with the detox until you have achieved the results you want.

3 KEEP A PROGRESS DIARY Write up your detox experience at the same time every evening. Be honest and include any obstacles, whether external or self-generated, so you can address them the next day. This will help to identify the benefits as well as the negatives of detox.

4 BUY AN ALARM CLOCK Lose the phone and sleep alone! If your phone is your alarm clock, you are extending an open invitation to the entire world to come into your bedroom. Sleeping with our phones gives us a sense of being connected. But it also interrupts self-contemplation, relaxation, creative thought and sleep — looking at a bright screen for two hours makes the body release 22% less melatonin, the hormone that triggers sleep. Switch off your phone overnight and charge it in another room, so it isn't the last — or first — thing you reach for. When you wake up, open the curtains and let in natural light to reinforce your body's circadian rhythms.

5 CREATE YOUR SANCTUARY Establishing both a physical and mental space for you just to "be", to pause, unplug, unwind or meditate, will help you to reconnect with yourself, friends, family and the natural world around you. It can be a comfortable chair by a window, where you watch the light change or read a book. Practise mindfulness by listening to a favourite piece of music and fully focusing on every note. This practice

can reduce stress levels and make you more alert and productive.

6 SET UP A MEAL-TIME PHONE AMNESTY Before a meal, everyone should put their mobiles on silent and place them in a box by the door. Try implementing this routine for 21 consecutive days at all mealtimes. Discover the benefits of enjoying your food, being able to have “you” time and connecting with friends and loved ones through having — and being given — undivided attention.

7 REMEMBER THE MOMENT Instead of reaching for your phone every time you see an image you would like to capture, try to remember it. To re-enforce the message, you can even create a frame using your fingers — taking an imaginary photo will enable you to remember it more accurately. Immerse yourself in the experience by savouring the way it makes you feel. Capturing special experiences by being fully present and experiencing them as a 360-degree multisensory experience enables you to “live” the experience, instead of focusing on the visual elements. It’s much more meaningful.

8 SET UP TECH-FREE ZONES Try making parts of your home, ideally its hubs, unplugged, screen-free zones. The living room is usually dominated by a TV screen, an always-on background to second screening by family members to be “together alone” while using their devices. Finding another place for the TV would provide a place for family members to communicate properly. If that creates too much resistance, organise agreed digital downtimes and tech-free zones. These

could also be applied to other areas, such as bathrooms, bedrooms, cars or public transport.

9 TURN OFF NOTIFICATIONS Receiving continuous alerts on your device disables our ability to focus on one thing at a time. Disable alerts from apps, email and messaging to reduce the constant pull of your device. Regain control of the amount of attention you are willing to give it — you can check your phone in your own timeframe.

10 MAKE A PLAN Write a list of the activities to do in your detox and prepare in advance so you won’t need to take your phone — check the location, the weather, your diary and your contacts, and write down what you need. Make arrangements to meet up in advance, agreeing the location, and make sure you are on time (as was done premobile). It will engage and excite you.

11 TRY A DETOX HOUR Go for a run, take your lunch hour, unplug with your partner or friends. Put your device away and enjoy the moment. Set yourself a tech-free hour on each day of the weekend and feel the freedom of fully immersing yourself — take a long bath, go for a walk, cook something from scratch, read a book, listen to music. As you start viewing your downtime as a positive tool for reconnection, you may want to

extend your hour.



THE UNPLUG HOLIDAY

Unplugging for a week takes planning. Write a list of what you would like to accomplish. If you're staying at home, prepare well so there's no excuse to plug back in. Then store all your computers and devices out of sight and

let all concerned parties know that you'll be unavailable for the week. Try to include some physical activity every day, allow daily quiet time for meditation, contemplation or writing down your thoughts, and make sure you factor in some "slow" moments where you live more mindfully. To make lasting change takes commitment and repetition. After a week offline, you will have experienced a new sense of freedom, a new, gentler timeframe that allows for pausing and feeling again.

Extracted from Unplugged: How to Live Mindfully in a Digital World, by Orianna Fielding, published by Carlton Books (£12.99). To buy it for £11.69, inc p&p, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/bookshop or call 0845 271 2135



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