



Technology Addiction Guidebook

Definitions of addiction:

- *A primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry.*
- American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM)
- *A behavior that stops brain pain such as loneliness or insecurity, or physical pain.*
- Dr. David Haase

Take the test

[Tech Addiction Self-Assessment Compulsion Test - by Dr. David Greenfield](#)

Other questions to ask yourself that may signal addictive behavior:

- Do you pull out your smartphone whenever you have a few moments of alone time, like on an elevator or while waiting in line?
- Do you often use your smartphone when hanging out with your kids?
- Do you use your smartphone when out to dinner with friends, family, or when on a date?
- Do you often use your smartphone when you are walking or outside in nature, on the beach, or in the woods?

Why Care about Tech Addiction?

Technology devices impact awareness

- Technologies such as smartphones, social media, and the internet were engineered to take advantage of human vulnerabilities and hardwired basic needs.
- Tech addiction is socially acceptable, but that does not mean it is normal or not harmful.
- Awareness of the harmful impacts of these technologies is increasing.

Never get high on your own supply

- The fact that tech devices and the internet are addictive by their very nature is not a secret among those who design and profit from these technologies.
- Some of the most successful tech titans strictly limit their children's use of smartphones and computers.



The statistics supporting technology addiction

- Those born in 2013 or later will spend a year of life in front of a screen by the age of seven.
- Younger children in the United States now spend five and a half hours each day with entertainment technologies.
- Average Americans spend more than four hours a day on their phones: 28 hours a week, 112 hours a month, or 56 full days a year.
- Teens spend eight hours each day playing with screens and phones.
- Nearly 80 percent of Americans check their phones within a half hour of waking up.
- Nearly five out of 10 Americans agree with this statement: *"I can't imagine my life without my smartphone."*
- 70 percent of office emails are read within six seconds of arriving at work, interrupting anything else employees may be working on. There is an average of 36 interruptions every hour.

Why Are We so Addicted to Technology?

Technology addiction is not a personal failing. It is something that humans are vulnerable to. *Why?* Because humans are biologically hardwired to seek new information and are vulnerable to distractions.

- Evolutionarily, these behaviors are protective.
- We want our attention drawn to changes in our environment because those changes could indicate threats to our survival.

Dopamine addiction

- Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that activates pleasure centers in the brain, training us to associate certain behaviors with rewards.
- The brain releases dopamine in anticipation of a reward anytime you think of your phone.
- The brain learns that checking your phone often results in a reward.
- Anything that triggers dopamine release has habit-forming potential.
- Intermittent reinforcement releases dopamine:
 - Getting a reward for behavior only some of the time rather than all of the time.
 - When we know that something could happen, but we are not sure that it will, for example:
 - Will there be another Like on Facebook?
 - Instagram created code that deliberately holds back showing users new Likes so that it can deliver several of them in a sudden rush creating a bigger validating effect.



Health Impacts of Technology

- **Poor sleep:** 50 percent of adults claim they do not sleep well because they are always connected to technology.
- **Safety:** Texting while driving is six times more likely to cause an accident than drunk driving, and it is now the leading cause of death among teen drivers.
- **Technology negatively impacts mental health:** It's associated with anxiety, stress, depression, and ADHD.
- It may be **decreasing our attention span.**
- It contributes to the **decline in creativity** among children, particularly young children from kindergarten through sixth grade.
- **Smartphones are endangering solitude** and the default mode, which is the mental state where we solve problems, generate our best ideas, and do autobiographical planning. It affects how we understand and empathize with others and make moral judgements.

The unknown effects on a generation

Are our children in danger?

This is the first generation without the experience of solitude. What will the effects be?

- Smartphone use decreases the quality of our interactions/conversations with others.
- Decrease in empathy:
 - The presence of a phone in our visual field can decrease empathy.
 - *Phubbing* (snubbing + phone) is when someone pays more attention to their phone than us.
 - There is a higher level of empathy and quality in face-to-face conversations with the absence of mobile devices.
- Smartphones distract parents from cultivating feelings of connection and spending quality time with their children.
- Technology causes FOMSI (fear of missing something important).
- Technology inhibits the development of social skills in children.
 - Humans are hardwired to be social and look for a sense of belonging.
 - If children miss face-to-face interaction during the social-emotional development window (age zero-three), they may never develop these skills adequately later in life.

What You Can Do



Tips for overcoming technology addiction

1. **Assess current usage.**
 - Take an online smartphone compulsion test.
 - Use apps that track usage, such as [Moment](#) (iOS) and [SPACE](#) (Android).
 - Keep a journal to keep track of your usage.
2. **Cultivate awareness.**
 - We must be aware of our behavior in order to change it.
 - Meditation or mindfulness trains your attention to be less distracted by technology.
 - Apps like [Headspace](#), [Calm](#), and [The Mindfulness App](#) can help improve awareness.
 - Apps such as HeartMath's [Inner Balance](#), and [Muse](#) can improve wellness and increase your sense of inner well-being.
 - Write down what you want to pay attention to—take a picture of it—and set that photo as your phone's lock screen.
3. **Turn off all non-essential notifications** except phone calls, text messages, and calendar functions.
 - If required by your work, use an email app to assign VIP status to certain people (example options: Astro, Polymail, and Spark).
4. **Uninstall social media apps:** Batch social media and email use—schedule to check them only two to three times a day.
5. **Create phone-free areas in your house.**
 - Never bring your phone into your bedroom.
 - Avoid having your phone at the dinner table.
 - Charge your phone near the front door.
6. **Schedule a weekly tech detox day** when you don't interact with any screens. Consider every Sunday (or start with a half-day).
 - Use an autoresponder on your text messages stating that you will respond later.
7. **Do longer digital detoxes** of three- to four-day digital detoxes quarterly and one or two 10-day digital detoxes per year.
 - Relax, connect with yourself and your family, and enter the default mode (where creativity and innovation happen).

Tips for a digital detox

- Enjoy activities that you love doing and that engage your attention.
- Consider deleting your email while you are gone.
- Set up an autoresponder that states you are away on vacation.
 - Example: *"If this is an emergency, you can reach (individual of your choosing)."*
 - Example: *"Because life is short and I don't want to come home to a mountain of email, I am*



going to have all my emails deleted while I am gone. If it is really important and you need to reach me, you can email me when I get back.”

Practice Breaking the Habit Loop

Habitual neurological loop: Cue □ Routine □ Reward. Phone notification sound (cue) □ Check the notification (routine) □ See what the notification is about (reward).→ Routine □ Reward. Phone notification sound (cue) □ Check the notification (routine) □ See what the notification is about (reward).→ Reward. Phone notification sound (cue) □ Check the notification (routine) □ See what the notification is about (reward).→ Check the notification (routine) □ See what the notification is about (reward).→ See what the notification is about (reward).

Breaking the loop: If you hear the notification sound (cue), take one deep breath instead of picking up the phone.

Helpful apps, web extensions, and counseling

- The Google Chrome extension [News Feed Eradicator for Facebook](#) replaces your entire Facebook newsfeed with an inspiring quote
- [Facebook Demetricator](#) hides numeric values on Facebook.
- The [Freedom](#) app and website blocker helps eliminate distractions.
- The [SelfControl](#) app blocks your own access to distracting websites for a period of time.
- With the [Forest](#) app, you plant a digital tree when you want to focus.
 - The tree will keep growing as long as you stay focused.
 - When you close the app, the tree starts to die.
 - If you stay committed, you plant a whole forest.
 - Virtual coins earned from focused time are used to plant real trees.
- Apps like [Time Out](#) or [Workrave](#) remind you to take breaks on your computer.
- **Books:**
 - How to Break Up with Your Phone, by Catherine Price
 - Bored and Brilliant, book and program by Manoush Zomorodi
 - Reset Your Child’s Brain, by Victoria L. Dunckley, MD
 - The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains, by Nicholas Carr
- **Seek help when necessary.** There are therapists and counselors that specialize in tech addiction.

Remember This Is an Addiction

- Breaking a tech addiction is hard, but it is also **worth it**.
- **Getting support is key**, and significantly increases your chances of success.
- **Have empathy and compassion for yourself.**