

## SCREEN TIME AND MENTAL HEALTH

*Written by The Harvard*

While being online around the clock may feel like an inevitable byproduct of modern life, many people are seeking healthy, personal ways to connect. And for good reason. If history has taught us anything, it's that too much of anything has side effects, physically and psychologically.



Medical experts across specialties are now witnessing a rise in digitally related maladies, from the physical burden of headaches, carpal tunnel, and neck and shoulder pain to such mental ailments as anxiety and increased depression. With that in mind, many are taking new approaches to minimizing the amount of screen time in their lives. So, where to start?

### Digital Detox

A “digital detox” is pretty much exactly what it sounds like – a break from devices.

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A fresh start isn't a new place, person, or thing. It's a new mindset.

*Quotes sourced from [Self By Design](#)*

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### Book of the Month Recommendation

#### **The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains**

by Nicholas Carr

Nicholas Carr's bestseller *The Shallows* has become a foundational book in one of the most important debates of our time: As we enjoy the internet's bounties, are we sacrificing our ability to read and think deeply? This 10th-anniversary edition includes a new afterword that brings the story up to date, with a deep examination of the cognitive and behavioral effects of smartphones and social media.

Most effective as a multi-day break (perfect for a weekend), some people find starting with a 24-hour retreat is more manageable. Whether it's an entire weekend or just a 24-hour retreat, people who try a digital detox emphasize the benefits of unplugging, citing increased productivity, creativity, and more meaningful connections with loved ones, not to mention better sleep and less aches and pains. In fact, many experts insist you can feel the physiological effects almost immediately when initiating a digital detox.

### **Library Hours**

Being “on” all the time means getting into rest mode can be quite difficult, and the rejuvenating benefits of a good night's sleep are being lost to sleepless nights – mostly because people are having a tough time winding down and disconnecting from their devices. It's no wonder why insomnia is one of the most common side effects of excessive screen time. Implementing set screen-free times in your home (say, 7pm-7am) can help.

If you find yourself fidgety without a phone at bedtime, make a plan to be more active the following night. Even a 30-minute nighttime walk around the neighborhood could help you fall asleep. The fresh air and exercise allow for time to reflect and can help you focus your thoughts.

### **Dumb Phones**

Many people can still remember a time when we weren't always buried in our phones and checking our feeds. And you know what? It wasn't that bad. But if you can't quite let go of all connection, a “dumb phone” might be a solid option. Despite the insulting name, dumb phones are a great tool for those looking to curtail their social activity, as they're designed to only make voice calls and don't offer all the other distractions of smartphones. The good news is, most mobile service providers have options for this type of phone, too.

### **Kids & Social Media**

For kids, teenagers, and their families, managing a healthy digital life can get more complicated. Younger people are merging their online/offline lives with even less boundaries, and sharing and commenting on everything in the process.

Cyberbullying, and the inadequacy or isolation that social media engenders in many youth, are topics that seem to make headlines on a weekly basis, but by spending more time with our kids (and off of our own phones), we can guide them to what healthy self-expression looks like. It's not only about limiting exposure, but also helping to guide how they use and navigate digital spaces – which could even mean sitting down to play video games with them. After all, when kids know what being “liked” really feels like, clicks on a social stream hopefully won't hold as much sway.

**For more information or advice, contact eni online at:**

**[www.eniweb.com](http://www.eniweb.com)**

## **Common Sense Guidelines for Social Media**

### **Safeguard Selfies**

Not everyone needs to see everything. If all you do is post selfies, try mixing it up. Self-worth is real in the real world.

### **Honor Boredom**

Celebrate having nothing to do. Learn to be comfortable in this space, and the balance of your body and mind will thank you.

### **Be Social**

Use connections to promote real-life interactions whenever possible, whether that's joining interest groups or posting in forums that exchange ideas more than selfies.

### **Be Present**

Guide your kids through the social media wilderness by paying attention to them, and participating in digital spaces with them.

### **Take Sabbaticals**

Taking a day off from technology can not only promote more real-life experiences, it can enlighten your perspectives of self-worth.