Finding Balance: Tips for a Healthy Relationship with Technology

For most of us, completely giving up technology is not realistic, nor is it likely necessary. Good strategies can help us find a healthy balance—enjoying the benefits while minimizing harms.

- **Set a schedule—and stick to it.** Give yourself a set period of time each day to check social media or personal email, for example.
- **Limit the number of times you check emails in a day.** In one recent study, people who purposely checked their work email only a few times a day reported less stress and the same productivity as people who checked their email constantly over the day.
- **Unless it's part of your job, ask yourself how quickly you really need to respond** to texts, emails, or other messages. The faster you respond, the faster people expect you to respond next time. Think about setting limits or guidelines so others know what to expect.
- **Turn off unnecessary notifications.** Unless it's part of your work or another important obligation, many notifications on your phone and other devices may not be needed.
- **If you have a hard time limiting technology use, take advantage of apps and programs** that limit your access to certain website, apps, or other features.
- **Set guidelines and discuss your expectations with others.** For example, you and your friends might agree to put your phones away when you're out for dinner. If a family member often texts late at night, you might let them know that you plan stop checking messages at a certain time.
- **Take regular breaks during the day.** Get away from your computer, turn off your phone, and spend time without technology. it doesn't have to be a long break—even an hour or two can help.
- **Consider a 'digital vacation.'** Choose one day a week to completely stay away from a device. If that feels overwhelming, start with a half-day vacation.

- **Try to reduce screen time before bed and keep screens out of the bedroom.** It's easy to stay up much later than intended when you're online, gaming, or trying to write a few emails before bed. There is also evidence that the blue light emitted by devices may affect healthy sleep, long after you've turned the device off.
- **Regularly choose off-screen activities over on-screen activities.** For example, choose to play soccer with friends over playing a video game of soccer.
- **Reduce distractions.** Many of us split our attention between a few different activities, like playing games while watching a movie or watching TV while eating dinner. Try to designate one distraction-free day or evening a week so you can focus on the most important activity.
- **Think about the example you're setting** for children or other important young people in your life. Kids pay a lot more attention to what we do than what we say. That's also true for technology use.
- **Avoid comparing yourself to people you see online**, including your friends. Remember that people usually just post their good news and their best pictures online—and a lot of people edit their photos and use filters to make them look as good as possible.
- **Practice mindfulness**, which is a skill that helps you fully experience the present moment. You may be less likely to text while you're walking the dog—and feel better for doing so.

The Smartphone Compulsion Test (Dr. David Greenfield)

Answer each question yes or no.

	Yes	No
1. Do you sleep with your cell or smartphone (turned on) under your pillow or next to your bed regularly?		
2. Do you feel ill-at-ease or uncomfortable when you accidentally leave your smartphone in the car or at home, have no service or have a broken phone?		
3. Do you feel reluctant to be without your cell or smartphone, even for a short time?		
4. Do you wish you could be a little less involved with your cell or smartphone?		
5. Do you feel your use of your cell or smartphone decreases your productivity at times?		
6. Do you find yourself mindlessly checking your cell or smartphone many times a day, even when you know there is likely nothing new or important to see?		
7. When your cell or smartphone rings, beeps or buzzes, do you feel an intense urge to check for texts, tweets, emails, updates, etc.?		
8. Do you find yourself spending more time on your cell or smartphone than you realize?		
9. Has the amount of time you spend on your cell or smartphone been increasing?		
10. Do you find yourself spending more time texting, tweeting or emailing as opposed to talking to people in person?		
11. When you eat meals, is your cell or smartphone always part of the table place setting?		
12. Do you find yourself viewing and answering texts, tweets and emails at all hours of the day and night—even when it means interrupting other things you are doing?		
13. Do you seem to lose track of time when on your cell or smartphone?		
14. Do you find yourself mindlessly passing time on a regular basis by staring at your cell or smartphone?		
15. Do you text, email, tweet or surf while driving or doing other similar activities that require your focused attention and concentration?		