

10 tips to decrease negative stimuli

What would you do if you had one extra hour of free time per day? Write down, all the things you would do with this extra hour. Think about things that are important to you: exercising, going to bed earlier, meeting up with friends, ...

Why do I encourage you to think about this question? If you become more aware of your cellphone usage, you can easily gain one hour per day. If you don't feel like you could benefit from spending less time on your phone, you're not likely to change your habits. And that's obviously fine too.

However, most of us already realise we should be spending less time on our phones. But then why is it so difficult to put our phone aside? Well, there are a couple of reasons.

The first one brings us back to **dopamine**. Dopamine is often referred to as the feel-good-hormone. Our brain releases dopamine whenever we encounter feelings of joy. Dopamine is directly linked to the reward system in our brain. It comes to no surprise that we actively seek this reaction. This is the good part of the story. However, there's also a downside. Our brain also releases dopamine when we receive new information. So every time we receive a message, an e-mail, a newsflash, ... dopamine is released. Since we pleasure seeking creatures (and dopamine gives us that), we can easily become addicted to our cellphones and actively search for new information and new impulses.

Then, there's also the issue of **FOMO** (fear of missing out). Literally the fear of not being part of something or being left out. Let's take a minute to think about this. How much do you really miss out on by playing on your phone? For example, looking at a sunset on a screen is not comparable to seeing it with your own eyes. Only partly watching a tv-show because you are glancing at your phone does not give you the same satisfaction as giving it your full attention. And conversations lose depth when your phone – almost literally- gets in the way



10 tips

What steps can we take to counteract this?

1. The first step is awareness. Take a good at your cellphone usage. How often do you grab your phone? You can download apps like 'moment' or 'quality time' to track your screen time.
2. When reach for your phone, notice why you do so. Are you actively searching information? Or are you distracting yourself or trying to kill time? I notice that I often reach for my phone when I'm seeking distraction because I had negative thoughts or when I'm stuck and don't know how to proceed with a task. I have now developed the habit of asking myself: how is my phone going to help me? Usually it won't help me, so I try to put my phone back down.
3. Disable your notifications. You can turn off notifications for your e-mail, Whatsapp, Instagram, ... Bear in mind that behind each of these applications there's a team of psychologists that try to keep you engaged with their app for as long as possible. So often it's difficult to close the app once you've started scrolling through it. So, try to avoid 'being pulled in' by turning off your notifications and decide for yourself when you want to engage with the app.
4. Buy a watch and an alarm clock. It sounds really easy but after checking the time and setting your alarm are two common excuses for using your phone. If you provide an alternative you don't need your phone to check the time. In addition, leave your phone out of your bedroom. This will improve your sleep and limit distractions when you wake up in the morning.
5. Dare to turn off your internet. This will limit the desire to check your phone, but you are still reachable by phone. When I'm traveling, I often put my phone on airplane mode so I can still take pictures. That way I'm not distracted by my phone and can enjoy my surroundings to the fullest.
6. When you decide to decrease your online-time, make sure you communicate this to others. I once found myself in a situation where I disconnected myself from the internet and showed-up at the wrong restaurant because I hadn't checked my latest messages. By now people know I often turn off my internet and when they urgently need me, they send me a text message.



7. It's also important to be proactive. Make sure to research beforehand so that you don't need internet when you're on the move. That was a pitfall for me in the beginning. I wanted to spend time offline, but I hadn't written down the address or a phone number, I then had to turn on my internet and before I knew it I was mindlessly wasting time online.
8. You can also include family and friends, by organising dinner dates without phones for example. You can ask everyone who enters the room to drop their phones in a basket and only pick it out again after the evening.
9. Learn to become comfortable with being bored. From time to time your brain craves boredom and less impulses. Try implementing short breaks, such as when you're queuing up at the check-out, or waiting for a friend, waiting for the bus, ... grant your brains the rest it needs.
10. Try leaving your phone home from time to time. Start with short breaks and assess if you are missing out on something. Probably not. If you do, then it probably won't outweigh the benefits from disconnecting and giving your full attention to something else.

Those were my 10 tips to distance yourself from your phone.

I don't urge you to not use your phone at all anymore. Our smartphones are very handy devices and I wouldn't want to live without one myself anymore. However, I do urge you to rethink your phone and internet usage. Ask yourself what you want to use your smartphone for. Which apps make your life easier, because they can be valuable.

I wish you good luck and a lot of fun with trying out the tips. If you want to learn more, be sure to follow Lifegoal Academy on Instagram (obviously without notifications). If you want to learn more about the upcoming training **Digital Detox**, subscribe to the newsletter through www.lifegoalacademy.be/digitaldetox



