

Why Mindfulness is Not Enough: 5 Strategies to Change your Smart Phone Habits for a Healthier Self

The Problem

Smartphone **addiction** and being hooked on social media is a common phenomenon today, especially among the young millennial generation. While a lot of that has to do with our missing self-regulation, really it is by **design** that we are hooked to our devices. For our brain, a "like" on our Instagram picture or Facebook post equals eating a piece of chocolate or being told we did a good job on a task. Dopamine doesn't discriminate between digital or real world rewards (check out this **TED talk** on smart phone addiction by Lior Frenkel). Whereas apps live off consumer traffic and thus, are created in a way that clicking on one link makes us click on another until we get lost in the depth of an app jungle, I wonder if apps would have a similar appeal to consumers when they would reward "responsible" behavior. Just like eating high quality, **slow cooked**, non GMO food.

When we go to a little bit of a fancier restaurant, the plates are surprisingly small and the quality of food is high, compared to the plates at our local diner where the portions usually are enormous but the quality of food is low. Now psychologically, at first we are very happy to see lots of food on our plate since we are assured right there and then we will not starve! Phuu! Because really, this is what we thought, walking into the diner, oh so hungry. And what do we do with all that food? Of course we inhale it, since our self-regulation is long gone after our tongue got a taste of that good sugar and fat of our hamburger or triple cheese sandwich has more than enough of. Even though we are kind of full half way through the plate, we finish all of it. After all, our grandma told us that other people starve so you better finish your plate. We feel horribly full afterwards and not really well-nutritioned, but feel proud we finished that plate. Now, shift in scene: In the more upscale restaurant our plate looks a little different. On first sight it almost looks like we will continue to starve and this will never be enough food to tame that growling animal that seemed to have found a home in our belly. But then, we slowly enjoy every bite of this deliciousness, after all, there are not many of them, so we better enjoy them. We finish the plate and feel surprisingly full, but in a good and nutritious way. We are happy to pay the higher price for the better quality of food and the right size as well.

The Solution

We know this business model works in the food industry, so how about applying this to technology and apps. Instead of producing it mass scale, making it for a market that would be happy to pay a higher price (or a price at all) to receive nutritious and delicious services that support self-regulation and a good cause (non GMO style).

Now, while we still need to wait for content creators to build such apps for us, in the meantime it is on us to manage and self-regulate our smart phone habits that seem to follow more a diet of McDonalds, than that of the local Co-op.

The first step to again gain control over our smart phone habit is becoming aware of our habits.

We are so used to the “fast food” that we don’t even notice the consequences until our friend challenges us to go for a run, and we realize we cannot even make it one time around the house without feeling like total crap. Only when we look deeply into the mirror do we see the dark spots underneath our eyes because of the **low quality of sleep** we get every night because we scroll through social media right before going to bed and **check our phone** for messages even during the night. An unbelievable number of 63% are doing so!

Only when we arrive at the conference hotel and we notice we forgot our charger do we become aware of the **anxiety** that creeps up on us, knowing we could be without our extended arms for an extended period of time. And only through the experience of not being with our smartphone for 24 hours, because the conference is in the desert and there is a Holliday and we cannot buy a charger anywhere until the next day, do we notice how **much we are able to get done** not multitasking and not being distracted by the pings of our phones. Wow, who would have thought.

So **mindfulness**, that is the present moment awareness of our thoughts, behaviors and emotions, can certainly help us to become aware of our habits, which is the first step to challenge them. However, mindfulness is not enough to create new smartphone habits for a healthier self.

Here are 5 tips to start changing your smart phone habits toward a healthier self today:

1. Know: You are not alone.

There are many people out there hooked on the pings and likes of their phones and fail the challenge to create a healthier smartphone use diet. [Undigitize.me](#) started a campaign to raise awareness of smartphone addiction, and their pictures of [Phone Face Down](#) are a good start to remember the small moments in our daily life to unplug. And to remember: You are not alone in this challenge.

2. **Reward yourself:** Taking a [#RealBreak](#) during your work day, unplug for 15 minutes, and posting your successes on social media when you are done, is another good way to reward yourself for unplugging.

3. **Start small:** BJ Fogg, a researcher at Stanford developed a super easy program of [tiny habit](#) change. (Really, it is SO easy: Within one week I got myself to do pushups, squats and 1min of plank EVERY morning and to read 1 page of a book every night). Following his science based program, if you want to give up scrolling through your social media feed before you go to bed, start a new rule that AFTER brushing your teeth, your phone will stay face down on your night stand. Then find an alternative thing to do: AFTER putting your phone face down on your night stand, you read 1 page of a book/or write down 1 thing you are grateful for/ or take 5 deep relaxing breaths/ or write down how the day made you feel/ or meditate for 1 minute. This way you replace a bad habit with a good one and you can substitute your withdrawals symptoms with something else. Positioning the new habit after an old one will make it super easy to remember.

4. Reconnecting: What are the situations you tend to slack off on social media? Do you know the antecedents to your behavior? Is it boredom, stress, slacking off important deadlines, loneliness? Becoming aware of the WHY we scroll through the news feed repeatedly throughout the day without any agenda is a great mindful way to learn how this habit came about in the first place. How can you become aware? Reconnecting with your body and breath and noticing your posture is a good start.

5. Know thyself: Track your smart phone usage. Apps like **Moment**, or **breakfree** and **others** are great way to show you how often you unlock your phone and how long you spend on each app. You may be surprised what you find and you can start playing with it too. Can you undercut your time on certain apps or how much you use your phone from one day or week to the next? Share your successes with your social network and thus, use the technology for what it is intended to do: support your everyday life and well-being, not detract from it.