

DEVICE DETOX

A 45-DAY PLAN TO GET YOUR INTERNET USE UNDER CONTROL

- REIN IN YOUR TIME SPENT ONLINE
- LIVE MORE MINDFULLY
- FULLY ENJOY YOUR LIFE

ABOUT THE DETOX

This is a forty-five-day plan to help kick your addiction to screens — namely, the ones you use to access the internet. We created it because WE wanted a fuller detox plan ourselves, something that would provide a sort of “weaning off” from tech and that would incorporate elements of mindfulness and deep thinking about why we log on and what we can do instead.

The plan is designed to work perfectly with Lent and is timed to start on Ash Wednesday. If you’re doing it during another time of the year, that’s perfectly fine!

Just make sure you begin on a Wednesday, so the days of the week mentioned in the detox will still line up.

We were greatly inspired by Nancy Colier’s book *The Power of Off*. If you struggle with a screen addiction, this is the book to read! Our detox builds upon the ideas in her book (she has many other useful journaling prompts, as well). We wanted to create our own detox plan, one that would feel more relevant to our lives and would engage us a bit more deeply. We’re all mothers, so you’ll find that that’s a recurring theme in our detox.

HOW IT WORKS

The detox begins on a Wednesday, with five days of mindful preparation. You don’t have to change any of your screen-use behaviors during this time. The following Monday, we begin by limiting recreational screen use to six times per day. You get to decide how long each of these “sessions” lasts — but be honest with yourself. Set a time limit for each session and stick with it.

The weekends are times to practice and catch up with anything you’ve missed during the week.

This detox assumes that you’re “playing by the rules” and using your device only during the allowed times. If you’re having a hard time resisting the urge to log on more frequently, use mindfulness (staying aware of what you’re doing) and the lists you’re creating as we go along to fight back. Remember, the internet will still be there when you come back at your next scheduled session. You’re strong enough to make it that long! The lists we’re making should provide you with alternative activities to distract yourself from the urges — and with the reasons for wanting to.

If you’re having trouble staying within the allowed number of sessions each week, keep trying until you master it. That is, if you haven’t managed to restrict yourself to only six times during the first week, don’t throw your hands up and say, “Oh well!” and just keep powering on, without changing your behavior. Double down and do everything you can to consistently stay at six sessions per day. Once you’ve mastered that, continue on to week two and drop down to five sessions, etc.

We’re big fans of list-making and journaling, as will become *very* apparent during this detox. We’ve found that it’s highly beneficial to be able to share these writings with somebody else. If you’re going to be keeping a digital log, factor this into your screen-time sessions. Don’t let the detox become an additional excuse to go on-line. It would be best if you could also keep a pen-and-paper log, especially for the lists, so you can work on them (and consult them!) without needing to be in front of a screen. On the same note, print out this detox, so you can consult it while off-line.

PREPARE

PREPARATION DAYS (DAYS 1-5 / WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY)

- Day 1:** Think about the feelings you experience from your screen time. As you go along, thinking about logging on / turning on your device, notice how you feel. Are you anxious, excited, guilty, bored? As you anticipate turning on the device, how do you feel? When you are on your device, how do you feel? And after you put it down? Be honest about your feelings — good or bad.
- Day 2:** Think about what you get from your screen time. Aside from the hit of dopamine, what is it about going online that feels so good? Is it about connecting with other people? A distraction from boredom? Collecting inspiration? Make a list of the reasons behind your device use. Using this list, go item by item and think of screen-free alternatives to meet the same goals. For example, if you typically spend ten minutes a day texting with a certain friend because you crave communication, perhaps you could instead arrange a standing coffee date on the weekend. Or just speak to them on the phone 1-2x per week, after your child has gone to bed. These will be more meaningful interactions than distractedly looking at your phone all day.
- Day 3:** Mindfulness, or being fully aware/conscious/present in every moment, is a virtue many aspire to. As you go through your day, try to be more PRESENT in every activity you do. Including in your screen time. Take note of what distracts you, but gently try to push distracting thoughts aside and focus on present moment. Notice what factors negatively/positively affect your mindfulness.
- Day 4:** Imagine what it will be like to be free of your Internet addiction. How will you feel? In what ways will you be different? Write down the characteristics of your new self. Try to visualize scenes from your ideal, screen-addiction-free life (e.g., running around after your child, outside in the sunshine). When you're tempted to pick up your device or log on, take another look at the list you've made. Know that this is what you're working toward.
- Day 5:** Determine what you consider recreational vs. necessary screen time. This could vary from person to person — somebody might say that social media is the only thing truly recreational; somebody else might include anything that's not related to their job, including personal banking and all personal e-mail. Try to be as strict as possible with yourself without making it impossible to fit everything into your allotted device times. Make a plan for everything you consider "necessary" screen time — working on your taxes or logging health information, for example. Every time you go online for these tasks, you're going to be tempted to "just check" a hundred other things. So figure out what's necessary each day and each week, schedule in the time you need to complete your tasks, and stay ON task!

TAKING ACTION

WEEK ONE (DAYS 6-10 / MONDAY-FRIDAY)

- Day 6:** Choose six times per day when you're allowed to go on-line for recreational purposes. Set a time limit for each session. They don't have to all be the same length (you might allow more time after the kids are in bed than during a midday session), but they should be consistent from day to day.
- Day 7:** By Week 4, you'll have whittled your recreational device use down to three times per day. When will these three times be, and why do they work for YOU? Think about what you get from hopping on-line and which times of day you'll benefit the most. You don't have to change any of your routines for now, but start thinking about this, so you'll be prepared.
- Day 8:** Create a game plan for your recreational screen time sessions. Write it down and put it somewhere you'll see it. We often tell ourselves that we're just going to check A, B, and C, but then we fall down the rabbit hole after A and waste our time before we even get to B or C. It's fine to do this sometimes, but you should figure out which times of day are appropriate for this sort of free-fall approach, and which times need more structure.
- Day 9:** If you haven't already, choose a home for your phone, and leave it there when you're not using it. Ideally, it'll be somewhere you can hear it if an important call comes through but somewhere that's as out-of-sight-out-of-mind as possible. If you use a computer rather than a portable device, power it down when you're not using it — or cover it with a small tablecloth for a similar out-of-sight-out-of-mind effect.
- Day 10:** During your allowed sessions today, limit your screen usage to only “mindful” or “rewarding” time. Every 2-3 minutes, check yourself. Is this rewarding or just time-wasting? As soon as you start to be bored, or are just browsing purposelessly, turn off the device. Log how long these “rewarding” or “mindful” sessions last for you.

Weekend Pause: Use the weekend to catch up on any of the above tasks you missed this week. There's nothing new to do, but don't let yourself “cheat” just because it's the weekend!

WEEK TWO (DAYS 13-17 / MONDAY-FRIDAY)

-  **Day 13:** Drop one of your recreational device times. You can either just cut one out and keep the others as-is or shuffle the time around so that your sessions are evenly distributed across the day. Whatever works for you. But make sure that you keep the time limit for each session the same. The goal is to decrease screen time, not just redistribute it! You should now have FIVE sessions per day.
-  **Day 14:** Think of a time of day when you're drawn to your device but wish you weren't. Sit down with your child and read books to them instead. How does it feel to connect with your child? Is there a permanent time of day, other than bedtime, that you can dedicate to reading with your child (even if it's only on the weekends)? Demonstrate through dedication and focus that books are special, and that reading is a special activity.
-  **Day 15:** Make a list of books that you want to read yourself. If you're not even sure where to start, use one of your screen-time sessions to ask friends on Facebook or elsewhere for their recommendations. We often say that we "don't have time to read" -- but we certainly find enough time to look at our devices! Usually, the time is there; we just have to prioritize differently and stop putting the internet at the top of the list. If you feel like you only have dribs and drabs of time throughout the day (enough to check your e-mail, but not enough to get lost in a good book), search out books that can be dipped into. Sometimes non-fiction can be better for this than fiction, or maybe short stories or poetry could be the way to go.
-  **Day 16:** Make a list of the chores and duties that you often let slip by the wayside in favor of staring at a screen. Be as specific as you can (e.g., "scrubbing the kitchen sink" vs "cleaning"). Recognize that these tasks are perennial and will never be "over and done" -- and allot them a place in your routine the same way you do your device. The next time you drop a screen-time session (at the start of a new week), choose three of your smaller "wayside" tasks, write them down and put them on the fridge. When you're at home, replace the dropped screen time with these tasks. (You can create a separate list of to-dos for when you're at work / out of the house, if you'd like.)
-  **Day 17:** Make your first waking thoughts mindful instead of turning on your device straightaway. Think about your intentions for the day and what you can do to meet your goals. Do the same before you go to bed at night. Choose a length of time that works for you, especially if some of your allowed device sessions are when your child is asleep. Even fifteen minutes upon waking up and settling down is great; go for an hour each time, if you can!

Weekend Pause: Use the weekend to catch up on any of the above tasks you missed this week. There's nothing new to do, but don't let yourself "cheat" just because it's the weekend!

WEEK THREE (DAYS 20-24 / MONDAY-FRIDAY)

- Day 20:** Drop one of your recreational device times. All the rules are the same as the last time you did this, but now you're down to **FOUR** sessions per day.
- Day 21:** If you can't hop online every time a question or thought occurs to you, you might find yourself forgetting about things by the time a screen-time session rolls around. Sometimes that's okay; sometimes it's not so okay. Come up with a screen-free method of remembering these questions and tasks. Old-fashioned pen and paper? Telling Alexa to create a note? What would work best for you?
- Day 22:** Practice mindfulness today by pausing every time you switch apps or websites during your online time. Perhaps by manually take your hands off the keyboard or put your phone down, or you could break up your browsing by taking a sip of water. During that break, consider if this last activity fulfilled you in some way or aligned with who you want to be as a person, and then consider whether the next activity you are planning will also be fulfilling or meaningful.
- Day 23:** Think about the spaces in which you use your device. If we want our lives to be more mindful, then we shouldn't be checking our phone — even during our allowed sessions — in the bathroom or while waiting in line or while distracted (especially if the “distraction” is another human being in the room!). When your device time rolls around, give yourself a peaceful place to log-on. If that's impossible in that moment, then ask yourself if that's honestly the best time to be staring at a screen.
- Day 24:** Defer your craving! When people smoke or have a food addiction, they are often trained to defer their cravings or postpone them until later. Make a list of 5-10 short (under-ten-minute) activities you need to do today. When it is time to log-in, complete one of these short tasks before logging on. We'll be dropping another device time in a few days, so a great bonus would be getting so immersed in your activity that you forget to log-on at all!

Weekend Pause: Use the weekend to catch up on any of the above tasks you missed this week. There's nothing new to do, but don't let yourself “cheat” just because it's the weekend!

WEEK FOUR (DAYS 27-31 / MONDAY-FRIDAY)

- Day 27:** Drop one of your recreational device times. Now you're down to THREE sessions per day.
- Day 28:** Choose one of your frequently-checked apps/sites (such as Facebook) and try to check it only once today — if possible, wait until the evening to check it. You can still do your other device sessions as normal; just don't go on that one app/site more than once during the day. How do you feel? Did you actually miss a huge amount by not checking multiple times? If you did, does it really feel like valuable information? If you can, continue to check this app infrequently in the future. As that becomes easier, try isolating other apps/sites to just one check-in per day.
- Day 29:** How do you feel about your fitness goals? This is another area where it can be so tempting to claim there's not enough time in the day/week. If you're struggling to fit in any form of regular activity, start small. Pick one of your allotted device times, and before you get on your phone or laptop, spend five minutes stretching or working on something like the hundred pushup challenge.
- Day 30:** One of the problems with being addicted to screens is that life become about the input and not the output. You can spend all day pinning gorgeous photos on your Pinterest boards, but what have you actually accomplished? Make a list of all the creative projects you would tackle if you had unlimited time. Split your list into Big Stuff (projects that would require serious time or funds to complete) and Little Stuff (projects you could finish in an hour or two). Try to tackle at least one of your little projects each weekend. If you need instructions or a recipe from the internet, be sure to print it out ahead of time, so your project time can be enjoyed offline.
- Day 31:** Use some of your online time today to do something kind, compassionate, or thoughtful for someone else. In this way, practice random acts of kindness — virtually!

Weekend Pause: Use the weekend to catch up on any of the above tasks you missed this week. There's nothing new to do, but don't let yourself "cheat" just because it's the weekend!

WEEK FIVE (DAYS 34-38 / MONDAY-FRIDAY)

- Day 34:** You've been keeping to your three sessions per day schedule for a week now. How is it going? Do you need to adjust the timing of the sessions at all?
- Day 35:** Commit to going screen-free for a long block of time this weekend, especially if you're getting together with family or friends. Choose one day to spend 6-8hrs without using your device or laptop. Encourage those around you to do the same, so you can enjoy one another's company without being distracted.
- Day 36:** Many of us are doing this to model good screen-time habits for our kids. Imagine all the things you will tell your kids about limiting screen time as they get older and feel more and more pressure to stay "connected". In what ways are you a role model? In what ways have you been a hypocrite? Do you feel like you're able to "walk the talk" now, or are you at least getting closer?
- Day 37:** Explore music. Maybe this just means turning on classical radio when you're usually more of an indie rock type of person. Or — even better — think about some of the songs you grew up singing and teach them to your child. If they already have a full repertoire of children's songs, pick one they love and make up movements to go with it. The goal is to let music be a creative part of your day instead of just background noise.
- Day 38:** We've come a long way already! Make a list of what's been working well for you. When you get the urge to check your device, what are you able to say to yourself to push the urge away? Which techniques just AREN'T working?

Weekend Pause: Use the weekend to catch up on any of the above tasks you missed this week. There's nothing new to do, but don't let yourself "cheat" just because it's the weekend!

WEEK SIX (DAYS 41-45 / MONDAY-FRIDAY)

- Day 41:** What is an activity you'd like your child to grow up remembering? A weekly baking session with Mom? Playing outside every day? Regular trips to the library? Choose something that will be meaningful to you and your child and commit to making it happen for the rest of the detox — and beyond!
- Day 42:** Choose one day a month (every month!) to be entirely screen-free. Put it on the calendar and don't let it take you by surprise (i.e., get all your necessary online tasks out of the way ahead of time!). If it helps, plan out activities ahead of time. Stick to it! You can make it one entire day without any "cheating". Check in with yourself throughout the day; how do you feel?
- Day 43:** Evenings are often a hard time to resist going online, especially with children, as everybody is tired and tapped-out by the end of the day. Create a list of quiet activities that will keep boredom from setting in but that don't require so much energy that you'll never do them. Bathtime for the babies? Puzzles with the older kids? How about getting things ready for the morning, so there's less of a time-crunch in the AM hours?
- Day 44:** Practice mindfulness today by taking five minutes to drink a cup of tea/coffee/water/juice before one of your online sessions today. Set a timer. During those five minutes, try to focus solely on the experience of drinking the water, how it feels, how it tastes, etc. Every time your mind wanders, bring it back to your beverage. Note how you feel and what you experience. Then, when you are online, try to practice the same focus.
- Day 45:** Before each of your three device times today, check in with your thoughts and feelings first, the same way you did on Day 1. How have things changed for you? Do you feel more in control now?

FINALLY!

You're done — you did it! If you've stuck with it this far, you've surely reshaped your habits in a healthy way. Keep going! Don't let the "end" of this detox be an excuse to slip back into your old way of doing things. If you're still struggling, just keep working at it. Go back to the beginning and focus on the days that gave you the most trouble.

How close are you to your final goal, to feeling free from your screen addiction? If you get together with family or friends during the Easter weekend, commit to staying off your device during that time. Try to persuade others to do the same. Notice the difference you feel when you're able to enjoy one another's company without the distraction of a screen getting in the way.