Help! I Can’t Put Down Your Technology
If you feel frantic at just the thought of being digitally disconnected, you’re not alone. Find out how your phone is changing the way your brain works. (Sorry, there’s no app that can stop it.)

Oliver isn’t proud of it, but he’s the first to admit his dependence: Even a five-minute trip to the store without his device is enough to fill him with unease, paranoia, and fear. But he’s not alone in this feeling—the stress and separation anxiety of going phone-free is so common, it’s been given a name: nomophobia (short for no-mobile-phone phobia).

Yes, technology helps us stay connected and informed. Who can even imagine life without the Internet in their hands or being able to text Mom to say “running late, don’t worry”? When technology does everything, however, it’s easy to become dependent on it. And now, scientists are beginning to wonder if our tech addiction is giving us a leg up, or putting obstacles (in many cases invisible ones!) in our path.

**Shaky hands. Sweaty palms.** Seventeen-year-old Oliver is restless, can’t focus, and keeps reaching into his empty pockets as his heart pounds with panic. But why—is he on the run from zombies? Vampires? Werewolves? Or all three? Actually, it’s a much more ordinary situation: Oliver accidentally left his phone at home.

**RING THE ALARM**

With your phone in your hand, you can look up a date for a history paper without cracking a book or trucking to the library. (Thanks, Wikipedia!) But despite having these shortcuts, students are still spending the same amount of time on homework today...
as they were 30 years ago, when smartphones were about as common as flying cars. So where’s all that time going? The answer may be at your fingertips. “I usually keep my phone on the desk or in my pocket while I’m doing homework,” says Oliver. “I’ll check any notifications I get, just as a little break.”

A “little break” may sound harmless, but more is happening during that brief digression than you think. Experts say each beep, chime, or chirp seizes your attention, triggering your fight-or-flight response, which is like a fire alarm for your brain. It’s designed to pull your thoughts away from whatever you’re doing so you can focus on the “life-or-death” situation in front of you. This response is vital if you smell smoke or come across a bear in the woods—but not so much when you get a text that says: “I’m SOOOOO bored.” After that false alarm pumps adrenaline through your body it takes your brain up to 30 minutes to regain focus—if it ever gets focus back at all.

That’s why texting-while-homeworking isn’t simply a casual distraction, it’s a major hindrance to getting stuff done. With a million apps bleeping for your attention, “you feel frustrated, pressured, stressed,” says Dr. David Strayer, a leading neuroscientist from the University of Utah. “It takes 50 percent longer to accomplish a single task, and you make up to 50 percent more errors.” Yikes!

**UNWRAPPING ADDICTION**

We should just put our phones down when we’re busy—but it’s not that simple. In fact, the constant alerts are purposefully designed to be irresistible. “If I hear a buzz or see a notification on my phone, I have to check it,” says Shane, 15. “It’s not even a choice.” And that’s not an exaggeration. These apps

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**Take Back Your Life**

We help 7 kids power down—and challenge you to do the same!

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**POWER DOWN**

Try a real-life hobby that forces you to put down your phone. Something like knitting or drawing will challenge your brain and entertain you, while actually improving your skills too.

*Time spent per day*

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**TIME WASTER**

124 MINUTES*

“If I didn’t have a phone, I feel like I would be bored all the time.”  —Oliver, 17

**SEE MONSTER**

140 MINUTES

“If my phone is there, it’s all I think about. If I see it, I want to use it.”  —Jonathan, 17

**DIGI-DISTRACTION**

179 MINUTES

“My phone causes distractions that make me procrastinate.”  —Quanasia, 17

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**Studies show that students with their phones tucked away score higher on tests!**

So when you’re trying to focus, always keep your phone out of sight and out of mind!

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**Institute tech-free times during the day so that you can stay focused on work, and turn off notifications for the apps most likely to distract you the rest of the time.**
Your phone isn’t the best way to clear your head. If you really need a break from homework, take a walk. The combo of moving your body and resting your mind will reinvigorate you for real.

“When I'm stuck on an assignment, I use my phone to give my mind a break.” —Sonya, 14

“I hate eating with friends when they just sit there checking their phones.” —Shane, 15

“Honestly, I was expecting 500 minutes. I feel like I’m always on my phone.” —Justina, 17

“Even getting out of bed is hard when there are 100 notifications to look at.” —Hannah, 14

Sleeping next to a screen can inhibit the release of melatonin, a hormone that helps your body know when it’s time to snooze. Always put your phone out of your reach before you go to bed.
The Facts That Matter: Tech Addiction

Texting while driving is 6x more dangerous than driving while drunk.

The average teen’s screen time per day.

96% of teens consider cell phones vital to their lives.

Only 92% consider their toothbrush to be vital.

3,339 number of texts teens send per month.

90% of texts are read within 3 minutes.

90% of students use phones at school for non-school related stuff.

150 the number of times an average person checks their phone each day.
feedback loop—they get a bigger hit of dopamine from the new or exciting, and that feeling can be addictive. To feed your craving for this feel-good jolt, you download more apps, join more social media networks, and send more texts—trapping you in an endless cycle of joy and letdowns.

**ATTENTION DETENTION**

Sometimes it seems like our phones have us in such a tight grip, it’s not even clear if we enjoy having them. “I feel like I’m programmed to always be wondering what’s going on,” says Oliver. Shane agrees, “It’s stressful to be with my phone, but it’s stressful to be without it.” There’s pressure to be available 24/7 for fear of missing out on the party, the gossip, or simply the connection. But when FOMO is overpowering your brain, there’s no room for creativity or problem-solving.

So what can you do? Consider this scenario: Have you ever stayed up late grappling with a tough problem? You go to sleep and the next morning you’re groggy. You hop into the shower, and miraculously—somewhere between the shampoo and conditioner—you find your answer. Is it magic water? Yes and no. Showers are a great way to wake you up, but they also force you to put down your phone. And when you’re finally free from the phone’s feedback loop, your mind can wander—often to the answer you were looking for.

“Technology is very addictive and very distracting,” says Dr. David Greenfield, founder of The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. “When you’re using it, [it’s keeping you from] doing something else.”

And whether that “something else” is homework, hang time with your friends, or anything in-between, it’s important to realize that your phone could be getting in the way—maybe even more than it’s helping you out.