

[Your Technology]

Help! I Can't Put Down



My Phone

By MARGARET KAMINSKI

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.)

▷ **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.

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.

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

Take Back Your Life

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



DONG!



DING!



TIME WASTER



124
MINUTES*

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

▶ 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

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

▶ POWER DOWN

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!

DIGI-DISTRACTION



179
MINUTES

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

▶ POWER DOWN

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.



How did you feel when you misplaced your phone?



73%
PANICKED



14%
DESPERATE



7%
SICK



6%
RELIEVED

are not only panicking you, they're also triggering your brain's reward center.

Think of each notification as a beautiful present from a relative with terrible taste. The festive ribbons and neat wrapping make your heart beat a little faster—even though you know from bitter experience that what's inside will be a regift at best. The same reaction happens when those enticing chimes are **beckoning** you. What awaits is surely a friend asking for the homework or a selfie of your sister, but your brain still jumps with joy because of the more improbable possibilities. "Hold up!" it says. "What if this is Alex asking me out, or Ariana Grande following me on Instagram?"

That excitement comes from a chemical called dopamine, which tells your brain, "Dude, that felt good—do it again!" even if it all ends in crushing disappointment. (You think: "Maybe next time will be different?") Teens are the most susceptible to this



Bring!



BRAIN BREAK



238
MINUTES

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

▶ POWER DOWN

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.

PHONE-Y FRIENDS



269
MINUTES

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

▶ POWER DOWN

Suggest a no-phone policy during meals, and if you want your friends to take the rule seriously, give it some stakes. (One idea: The first person to check their phone has to buy dessert!)

APP ADDICT



284
MINUTES

"Honestly, I was expecting 500 minutes. I feel like I'm *always* on my phone." —Justina, 17

▶ POWER DOWN

If you feel addicted to your phone, you need to cut back. Download an app like Moment for iPhone or Break Free for Android to track your usage, and put a timer on it to keep you in check.

SLEEP SUCKER



339
MINUTES

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

▶ POWER DOWN

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.



DING

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.



4 OUT OF 5
TEENS SLEEP
WITH THEIR
PHONE.

3,339
NUMBER OF
TEXTS TEENS
SEND PER
MONTH.

OMG ...HEY!
XO

90%
OF TEXTS
ARE READ WITHIN 3 MINUTES.



90% OF STUDENTS
USE PHONES AT SCHOOL
FOR NON-SCHOOL
RELATED STUFF.

LOL!



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.

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