How to break your phone habit to reclaim your time

Phones are incredibly practical tools, letting you stay in touch with your loved ones, watch videos, and even track your fitness, all from a device that fits in your pocket.

Your phone might be integrated into every aspect of your daily life, helping you manage your days.

However, while they are useful, phone use can slip into addiction. You might notice you constantly scroll through social media or check apps more than you realise, even when it's getting in the way of other goals.

The Guardian reports that UK adults spend an average of 7.5 hours a day looking at screens, with 3.5 hours on mobiles. Phones have overtaken TVs as the main way we consume media.

Understanding how this habit affects you could be the first step towards using your phone more intentionally.

With that in mind, continue reading to discover what a phone habit looks like and some practical ways to break it.

A phone habit could negatively affect your mental wellbeing

You may develop a phone habit when checking your device becomes automatic, often multiple times an hour.

You may pick up your phone to respond to a notification, and suddenly, 20 minutes have passed while you've watched videos or read news feeds.

This can start small, but over time, reliance on your phone can take large chunks out of your day.

Excessive phone use can affect your focus, productivity, and ability to enjoy offline activities. Research published in Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, accessible via the National Library of Medicine, even suggests that watching too many short-form videos negatively affects your attention span, making it challenging to complete simple tasks.

You may find yourself jumping between tasks or leaving larger projects unfinished.

A phone habit can also affect your general wellbeing. Indeed, using your phone late at night can disrupt your sleep, leaving you unable to cope with everyday stress.

Spending too much time on social media can even create feelings of anxiety as you compare your life to the lives of other people.

Over time, these habits can make it harder to reach personal goals, such as learning a new skill or improving your health.

You might feel less present in real-life situations and more susceptible to digital distractions.

You can take meaningful steps to break a phone habit

Thankfully, you don't have to give up your phone entirely to break the habit. Even small and deliberate steps could help you regain control. Read on to learn about some practical strategies you could try.

Track your usage

A practical first step is understanding exactly how often you use your phone.

Many devices have screen time trackers that show you how long you spend on each app. You may be surprised by how much time you spend using apps that don't add value to your day.

Checking these trackers can help you see where your time is going. Then, you can set yourself realistic goals.

For instance, you could decide to limit social media to 30 minutes in the evening or replace video time with a short walk.

Set clear boundaries

Creating clear limits around phone use can prevent you from automatically checking it.

You may want to keep your phone out of the bedroom to improve your sleep or avoid looking at messages during meals.

These boundaries could help you focus on your other priorities, such as reading, exercise, or hobbies, while reducing the urge to pick up your phone constantly.

Over time, these seemingly insignificant changes can make a meaningful difference in how you spend your days.

Remove distractions

Notifications are designed to pull you back into your phone. So, you may want to turn off non-essential alerts and keep only the most important ones active.

You could also delete any apps that trigger long scrolling sessions or place your phone in another room when you're focusing on work.

This reduces any temptation and gives your mind the space needed to concentrate on tasks.

You could even experiment with turning your phone to grayscale, which makes it less visually stimulating.

Replace your phone time with other activities

Whenever you feel the sudden urge to check your phone, you could replace this with something meaningful.

For instance, short walks, a chapter of your book, or a quick household task could take the place of mindless scrolling.

You could also use this time to reconnect with your friends and family in person or try your hand at a creative hobby.

These intentional actions can weaken your phone habit over time and give you more control over your day, while helping you enjoy real-life experiences more in the moment.

Seek support and keep yourself accountable

If you're struggling with your phone habit, you can always seek help from others.

A loved one could join you in a phone-free challenge, or you could use apps designed to encourage mindful usage.

Sharing your goals with others can even keep you accountable and motivated, as knowing that someone else is aware of your targets can encourage you to stick to them.

You could also seek professional guidance if your phone habits are affecting your mental health or daily life.

For example, several private health centres in the UK offer support for digital addiction through specialised therapy.