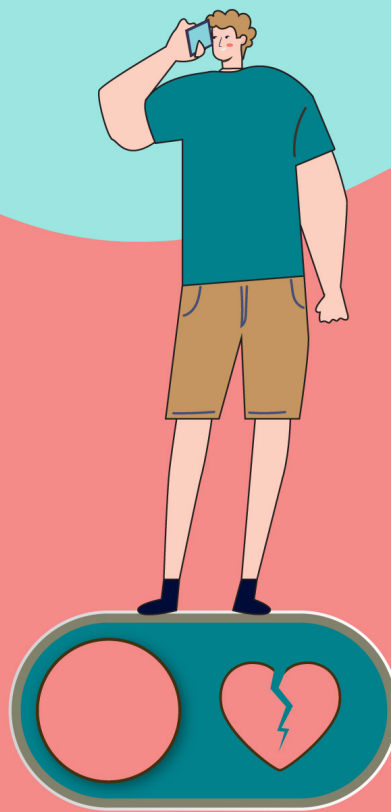


# SUMMARY

## HOW TO BREAK UP WITH YOUR PHONE

CATHERINE PRICE



# **Summary of “How to Break up With Your Phone” by Catherine Price**

Written by Alyssa Burnette

For everyone who needs to tell their phone, “It’s not me, it’s definitely you,” *How to Break up With Your Phone* (2018) offers a foolproof handbook for setting yourself free from one of our most popular toxic relationships.

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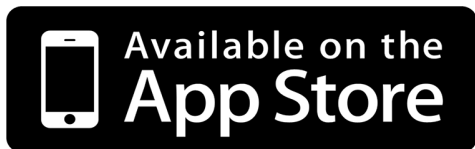


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# Introduction

How many times a day do you think you pick up your phone? I'm not even talking about the activity logs you can monitor on Instagram or Facebook to see how much time you spend on one particular app-- I'm talking about how many times a day you catch yourself grabbing your phone and checking something. And if a number doesn't spring to mind, you're not weird; we're all so connected to our phones that it's as if they've become extensions of our very selves. Whether we're checking a notification, glancing at the time out of boredom, or playing Candy Crush in the waiting room between appointments, interacting with our phones is second nature.

And so what, right? Although we're well aware of the dangers of certain types of tech habits, what could simply checking our phones hurt? We might not realize it, but each time we compulsively check our phones, we're programming ourselves to develop a technology addiction, one that can start our innocent and derail your life in the long run. So, through the course of this summary, we'll take a look at the science and psychology which informs our understanding of phone addictions and what we can do to combat it. We'll also learn some interesting facts like:

- How early civilization shaped modern phone habits
- Why getting distracted can worsen your memory and
- How technology impacts our sleep habits

# Phone Addiction is on The Rise

If you were to look around during your commute to work, whether you take the train, the tube, or you simply walk, you'll see them: the hoards of tech zombies, glued to their phones for one reason or another. That's not meant to be an insult; in fact, it's based on statistical evidence! Because according to a 2016 study conducted by Deloitte, the average American citizen checks their phone 47 times per day. However, for phone users in the 18-24 bracket, that number skyrockets to a whopping 82 times! The results of this study were later broken down by hackernoon.com in a secondary study which sought to clarify what these results mean in terms of time spent. And in fact, the study discovered that Americans spend an average of four hours per day with their phones. At seven days a week, that's 28 hours a week that we spend being consumed by our phones! That's the same amount of time we'd spend in a pretty busy part-time job!

So, if we go back to our earlier example, we can see that the issue at hand is actually much greater than just a few innocuous glances at our phones! Because 28 hours a week definitely counts as an addiction! If you want to learn more about your relationship with your phone, you can test yourself according to this simple quiz. Developed by Dr. David Greenfield at the University of Connecticut, the Smartphone Compulsion test asks the following simple questions:

- Do you often spend more time with your phone than you intended?
- Do you tend to get lost in scrolling?
- Do you find yourself communicating with people on the phone more often than you do in real life?
- Do you keep your phone on even while you're in bed?
- Do you frequently stop engaging with real life so you can check something on your phone?

If you answered yes to more than two of these questions, your chances of a smartphone addiction are pretty high. But don't worry! You're not too far

gone and you're definitely not alone; this is a form of addiction that affects almost everyone in America. So, let's take a look at how smartphone addiction works and how we can fight it.

# Social Media Triggers Dopamine

If you spend a lot of time on social media, you've probably encountered the "dopamine/ 'dope meme" pun. Built on the idea that funny (or "dope") memes and other popular social media content makes us happy, the wordplay acknowledges the chemical reaction that occurs when we enjoy something. And it's actually spot on! That's because dopamine is attached to the pleasure receptors in our brains. So, if a certain activity triggers a rush of dopamine, we're basically programming ourselves to keep engaging in that activity. This truth can even be traced back to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle common during early human civilization; dopamine was a useful tool during this phase of life because it motivated early humans to continue hunting for food and associate this act with the pleasure of eating.

But while dopamine can be good, it can also lead us to develop some negative cravings and addictions. And unfortunately, those who understand the science behind our brains' chemistry can manipulate it for marketing purposes. For example, Ramsay Brown-- the founder of start-up company Dopamine Labs-- spends his days designing algorithms for social media apps. Each app is literally programmed to trigger a rush of dopamine in the brains of individual users and thus, motivate them to stay on their phones and continue interacting with the app. The algorithms also attempt to hook us in other ways, like learning our interaction patterns along with what we "like" on the app. In so doing, it learns when we're likely to shift our attention and navigate away from the app, and it uses this information to trigger additional content or notifications that will literally keep us hooked!



# The Human Brain is Easily Distracted

If you've ever walked into a room and instantly forgotten what you came there for, this isn't news to you. And although we tend to think of distractions as being negative, in fact, distraction is not only perfectly normal, it's our brain's natural state! It takes a lot of effort for us to concentrate because our neurobiology sort of predisposes us to be distracted. Let's take a look at how that works. For starters, concentration can be difficult for us because our brain first has to decide what to concentrate on. This is a complex task performed in the prefrontal cortex, and unfortunately for us, the prefrontal cortex gets tired very easily. So, when it has to make too many major decisions or feels overloaded by the pressure of lots of little decisions, it sort of shuts down. This means that our brains quickly return to a state of distraction and we have trouble focusing on anything.

And it doesn't help that sustained concentration requires a lot of effort. In order to focus only on one thing, the brain has to disconnect from all unnecessary internal and external stimuli and prevent additional sensory information from competing for its attention. We might not be consciously aware of it, but every time we apply sustained concentration to any one task, our brains are actually putting up a firewall to protect us from distraction and it takes a lot of effort to deflect all those distractions for a long period of time. So, where do phones come in? To find out, let's take a look at how phones compare to other forms of media, like books.

One of the primary differences lies in the medium of print vs. electronic media. This makes a significant difference because engaging with printed media means that your distractions are only coming from the outside world. Whether that comes in the form of your cat begging for food or an unexpected knock at the door, your brain has a very clear sense of what it's trying to focus on (your book) and what interrupted it (the external stimuli). Phones, on the other hand, function differently. Because even if you're reading a book on your phone, engaging with print media in an

electronic format, the difference is that distractions abound on your phone. Your reading can be interrupted by a push notification, a text from your sister, an incoming call that suddenly changes your screen. And even if we swipe these notifications away, that little blip on our radar is all our brains need to lose focus. And before we know it, we can find ourselves scrolling Facebook with no memory of how we got there.

# Phones Disrupt Our Memory

As human beings, we treasure our memories. Memory is our portal for time travel, our way of revisiting ones we love and days gone by. Memory is our magic spell for conjuring the answers to a test. It's what helps us recall where we left our keys and what we need to pick up from the store on the way home. It's something we simply cannot function without and that's precisely why we're so afraid of diseases like Alzheimers and dementia which destroy the memory. But unfortunately, phones have a negative impact on memory as well. Because the distractions we discussed earlier aren't limited to simply interrupting your concentration while reading an eBook and neither are their negative impacts.

In fact, every time you look at your phone, you're damaging your short-term memory because the distraction of checking a notification prevents it from obtaining information about what's going on in the world around you. And because your short-term memory can only keep track of a few things at a time, if you're checking a barrage of Instagram notifications around the same time you meet someone new, you may not be able to recall their name or face. Similar detriments can occur in your long-term memory as well. Because your long-term memory's job is to keep track of big picture events like what you did last week and the year you graduated college-- but that data starts its journey in the short-term memory.

Because these events originate as a very recent experience-- and thus, are housed in your short-term memory-- it's only transferred to long-term after the passage of time determines that your short-term memory no longer has room for it. But because the short-term memory can be fractured or disrupted by conflicting inputs from your phone, your entire memory process is in danger of collapsing. So, when the appropriate information doesn't get transferred to your long-term memory and you feel like you're losing chunks of time, your phone is actually to blame!

# Your Phone Disrupts Your Sleep Too!

You've probably heard this one before-- about how the blue light given off by your phone can wreak havoc on your sleep patterns. But have you ever taken a moment to evaluate the true impact of your nightly phone habits? You probably know, for example, that there's a science to sleep. But did you know that your brain needs to identify the absence of blue light in order to produce the sleep hormone melatonin? And because melatonin is what regulates your sleep cycle and tells your body to start winding down for the night, your entire sleep cycle can be disrupted by that last drowsy text you send from bed.

But the problems don't stop there. Sleep disruption leads to chronic fatigue, as you already know if you've ever pulled several all-nighters in a row. And in addition to making you feel generally lousy throughout the day, chronic fatigue can also lead to a host of health problems like cardiovascular disease. A 2008 study conducted by Harvard Medical School also discovered that sleep deprivation can even impair your decision-making and learning abilities, to say nothing of wreaking havoc on your emotional stability! And to make matters worse, symptoms set in with alarming speed. Because our bodies need seven to eight hours of good, uninterrupted sleep to function properly, long-term damage can occur after only ten days with an average of six hours of sleep per night. And even more disturbingly, the study discovered that after six hours of sleep, your alertness is as poor as if you'd gone 24 hours without sleep.

# Developing Phone Self-Awareness

So, now that we've taken an honest look at your phone's affect on your mental and physical health, let's start thinking about the breakup process. And let's also be clear that, even though we're using language which is normally associated with feelings of anger or pain (i.e. a breakup), breaking up with your phone doesn't mean that you have to be angry or hurt or make a moral judgment on technology. In this case, it's simply about evaluating habits which are toxic to your health and well-being and deciding you don't want to engage in those behavior patterns. You can even start with a trial breakup, which can be a great way to develop your self-awareness and discover the impact your phone really has on your daily life.

But if you do decide to reduce your phone usage, clarity is key. So, start by asking yourself: what are my motivations? And then be very clear in defining those motivations for yourself. For example, if you're starting out with the vague idea that cutting down on your screen time might be a good choice, that's not enough of a solid motivation. So, take a little more time to determine what you think would be better about life without your phone.

For example, your motivation could be to improve your mental health by cutting out toxic social media habits. You might do it so you can spend more time connecting with your family in real life or so you can use the time you would have spent on your phone to take up a new hobby or pursue a new goal. And once you've figured out your motivation, you can take the next step, which is evaluating your behavior. Start by trying to pin down the exact amount of time you spend on your phone every day. While Facebook and Instagram already show you how much time you spend on their apps, tracking apps like Moment or Offtime can help you get a holistic picture of how much time you spend doing anything on your phone each day.

The process of working out how much time you spend on your phone every day can be helpful because it not only forces you to become self-aware, it helps you to set realistic goals for improvement! It's also a great way to

learn how much time you could be devoting to healthier, more productive activities instead.

# You Can Delete Social Media Apps Without Deleting Your Online Presence

No doubt about it, social media apps are addictive. We get lost in scrolling through them when we go to the bathroom or while we're waiting in a line. They feed our nosey compulsion to know what everyone is up to. And once you start them, it's hard to give them up. However, because social media forms the bulk of our addictive time commitment to our phones, these apps should be the first to go when we initiate the breakup process. But as you contemplate deleting these apps, it's important to remember that that doesn't mean you have to delete your entire online presence.

If you decide you can later establish healthy boundaries with these apps, you can always download them again. And you can always check your accounts from your mobile browser (a much more inconvenient alternative which will limit your time on social media!) And in the meantime, while you're not scrolling through Instagram, just think of all the real-life fun you could be having! You can keep that thought in mind if you need some extra motivation and remind yourself that social media is only a shallow reflection of the genuine life experiences you want. So, remember that your goal is to make human connections and real memories and that deleting these apps doesn't have to be permanent. They'll always be there to re-download and your accounts are still intact. You're just taking a healthy break for now.

# How to Avoid FOMO

The “Fear of Missing Out”-- often abbreviated as FOMO-- is a common symptom of breaking up with your phone (or of spending too much time on social media). In both cases, people get the feeling that they’re missing out on something or not having as much fun as everybody else. This can be even more intense when you cut out social media altogether for awhile, as you might become obsessed with wondering what all your friends are up to. As these thoughts surge, it’s tempting to pick up the phone again or re-download the apps you just broke up with, but don’t do it!

Instead, remind yourself what you love about not being connected. Think about activities you enjoy now or things that brought you pleasure as a kid. If you spent more time outside during your childhood, maybe it’s time to pick that habit up again! Or maybe you can think of a hobby or interest that you’ve always wanted to pursue, but never tried. Whatever your new goals are, start by defining them and then making a concrete plan. You can streamline this process by tailoring it to the length of phone breakup you’ve decided on. So, if you’ve decided you want to go without your phone for two weeks, make a schedule that clearly identifies the amount of time you would have spent on your phone and the new ways you’ll use that time instead.

And as you brainstorm new and healthy habits to replace your phone addiction, you might consider one of the most beneficial replacements of all: exercise. Because our preoccupation with technology keeps our minds in a digital world, we often end up feeling disconnected from our bodies. Exercise is a great way to center yourself and get back in touch with your body. So, whether you start by taking up a walk or attending a Zumba class, use your newfound free time to cultivate the healthiest habit of all!



# The 30-Day Breakup Plan

So, now that we've taken a look at some suggestions for breaking up with your phone, let's dig a little deeper and assess a concrete breakup plan that will help you achieve real, measurable results. This action plan should be spread out over the course of 30 days, so let's take a look at what you'll be doing each day.

- Days 1-2

Use a tracking app to assess how much time you spend on your phone.

- Days 3-4

Pay attention to how you feel before, during, and after using your phone. Also make a note of how many times you interrupt a real-life activity to engage with your phone.

- Days 5-7

The social media breakup step. Delete those apps and start using your social media time for healthier activities.

- Days 8-9

Disable all push notifications and pare down your apps to only the ones you really need

- Days 10-12

Set up a charging station that isn't in your bedroom. This will help you to avoid reaching for your phone first thing when you wake up and right before you go to bed. You should also try to redirect your energy toward engaging with print books, so pick out some non-electronic stories that you'll enjoy!

- Days 13-14

Cultivate phone-free zones. For example, instituting a "no-phone rule" for the dining table or during mealtimes is a great place to start!

# The 30-Day Breakup Plan, Part Two

By this point, you've made it halfway through the 30-day breakup plan and you're well on your way to revamping both your life and phone habits! Great job! And now that you've spent the past two weeks focusing on your phone, we're going to reward your progress by making the next two weeks all about you. So, let's take a look at your next steps.

- **Days 15-16**

Practice some basic mindfulness. Whenever you find yourself tempted to reach for your phone, attempt some quick and quiet meditation instead. Listen to your breathing and allow yourself to simply stop, focus, and be.

- **Days 17-18**

Try some concentration exercises. Whether you're simply listening to a song-- and refusing to allow yourself to be distracted-- or concentrating on a poem, improving your focus will strengthen your resistance to being distracted by your phone.

- **Days 19-20**

This is your first trial separation. Over two full days (maybe a weekend), simply switch off your phone and don't check it. For two solid days. If it helps, you can keep a notebook around to jot down anything you want to look up later.

- **Days 22-23**

Use this time to reflect on your separation-- how it made you feel, what you missed about your phone, and what you like about phone-free time.

- **Days 24-26**

Use this time to clean up your digital life and remove anything that annoys you. Unsubscribe for junk email lists, unfollow accounts that bring you down, and sort your important emails into folders for easy access.

- **Days 27-30**

Use this time to continue monitoring your phone behavior. Do you find that you're now checking your phone less frequently? Are you more intentional about it, consciously keeping track of when you check your phone and why? Cultivate your awareness of these factors and document them by making notes (on paper) about your discoveries.

## Final Summary

Smartphone addiction is affecting more and more people all over the world and the most insidious thing about it is that many people don't realize how dangerous it is. But because this addiction can destroy our memory, sleep, and mental health, "breaking up with our phones" is crucial. By reducing the amount of time we spend on our phones and cultivating healthy habits, we can improve our mental and physical health.



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