



HOW TO reduce screen time IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

Singapore is such a digitally acclimatised society that spending too much time on digital devices has become a common problem amongst children and adults alike. "I'm just getting work done", you might say, but chances are that all the excess screen time you accumulate could translate into health and sleep problems in the near future.

DO I REALLY NEED TO CUT BACK ON MY SCREEN TIME?

The answer is most definitely a "yes" because our health bears the brunt in the following ways:

- **Physical aches and posture problems**
Spending long hours bent over a mobile phone can lead to neck and back aches, possibly even damaging your spine in the long run. Screen time also strains your eyes.
- **Issues with weight control**
Engaging in screen time is a largely sedentary activity, which means you burn very few calories for all the time you spend glued to the screen. This increases the chances of weight gain and the risk of obesity.
- **Increased risk of chronic health conditions**
Research studies have found that the sedentary nature of screen usage also puts you at a higher risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, metabolic syndrome, and even type 2 diabetes.
- **Less sleep and poorer sleep quality**
A lot of us are guilty of sleeping later to spend more time scrolling through our social media feeds. Not only are we depriving ourselves of precious sleep time, we are also increasing our exposure to blue light, which upsets your body's natural production of the sleep hormone melatonin.

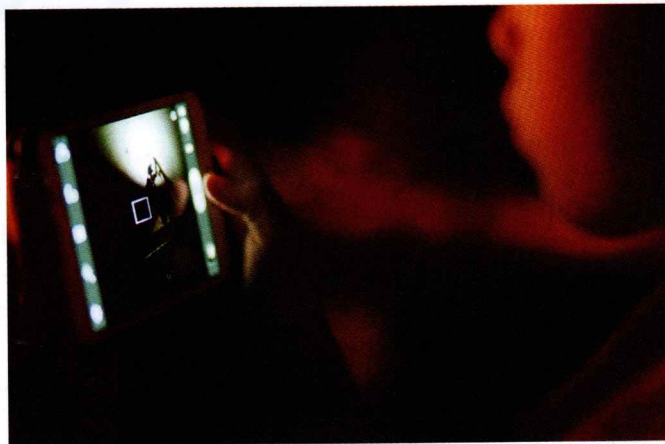
- **Mental lethargy**

While using digital devices is a physical sedentary activity, our minds are in fact concentrating and processing information that's on our screens. It's no wonder that spending long hours staring at a screen tires your mind out and causes you to lose concentration.

- **A vicious cycle**

The nature of digital screens makes it very easy to get addicted. It's so easy to tune into your devices anywhere and anytime that we start finding it hard to put them away.

With that said, reducing screen time can begin anytime, and here's how to do it!



TOP 5 WAYS TO REDUCE SCREEN TIME ~ FOR YOURSELF



- 1 Go out and socialise**
Go with the analogue option instead by initiating and planning outings with your family members and friends. Boredom and loneliness are usually what cause us to turn to social media, and quality face-to-face interactions can help you overcome this. To further reduce your screen usage, make it a point to avoid using your devices during social occasions and get the people around you to do the same.
- 2 Develop new / existing hobbies**
Investing time in hobbies is a great substitute for your unproductive screen time. Simple activities like reading a book, cooking or taking a walk may help you beat boredom, but working on a serious hobby is the best way to reduce the amount of time you spend on a screen in the long run.
- 3 Avoid bringing work home**
We spend enough time on our devices at work already. Bringing work home will only exacerbate the negative effects of too much screen time.
- 4 Keep your devices away from your bedroom**
Always try to keep your devices away from your bedroom – don't even charge them in there! This removes the temptation to lie in bed and scroll through your social media feed and also protects your brain from associating the bedroom with wakefulness.
- 5 Stay active**
Instead of relaxing for hours in front of the TV after work, engage in some exercise to unwind instead! Simple exercises like an evening jog or a leisurely game of badminton not only helps you to keep fit, but also helps you de-stress after a long day and will boost your mood significantly. Find out more about the different activities you can do at our Active Health Labs!

TOP 5 WAYS TO REDUCE SCREEN TIME ~ FOR YOUR KID(S)

- 1 Supervise screen time**
If you have kids, supervising their screen time personally will be the best way to manage their screen time habits and also regulate the type of content they consume. Discussing the on-screen content with your children also helps them practice their ability to process and interpret digital content, thus reducing the extent of cognitive impairment associated with excessive screen usage.

- 2 Setting limits**
Set the number of hours they can spend on their devices and keep to them – enlist the help of your other family members to keep them on track. If your kids are mature enough, you can even consider trusting them to not flout the rules. Setting specific times for screen time usage can also make it easier.
- 3 Talk about mindfulness**
Cutting back on screen time is largely an exercise in mental restraint and involves a lot of discipline. This makes being mindful extremely important if you want your kid to succeed in their screen-time reduction goals. Practicing mindfulness helps one to evaluate your feelings and actions better, while also facilitating better decision-making.
- 4 Keep devices away in social settings**
Whether taking your little one for a stroll in the park or lining up to get food from the snack stand, resist the urge to whip out your phone. Kids learn through imitation and if they see you doing something, they'll think that it's okay for them to do so as well.
- 5 Develop new / existing hobbies**
Don't be afraid to rope your kid in on whatever side project you might have. At the same time, encourage them to branch out and find something that interests them. Being able to connect with an activity is an important milestone in life as it teaches them about passion and what it means to want to be good at something.

At the end of the day, it's hard to avoid spending time on your devices when you live in a modern society like Singapore. This makes conscientious management of screen time all the more important!