

# Do You Spend Too Much Time on Your Phone?

## Objective

To reduce the amount of time you spend on your smartphone if phone usage is affecting your well-being or relationships.

## What to Know

Has anyone ever complained that you spend too much time on your phone? Perhaps you are aware that you spend too much time scrolling, swiping, and browsing on your phone—but you are unsure if you have a problem.

If you find yourself justifying the time you spend on your phone—like telling yourself you look at your phone to relax, or you need to constantly check your work email for updates—you might have a problem detaching from a device that has become an integral part of your life.

Here are signs you might spend too much time on your phone. Check off any that you are currently experiencing and then add up your total checkmarks.

You:

- are overly distracted or experience short-term memory problems
- feel lonely or isolated
- lack social skills
- have insomnia or experience disrupted sleep
- are less active and/or you have gained weight
- hear others complain that you spend too much time on your phone
- experience eye strain
- weakened judgment
- exhibit increased anxiety
- have problems focusing on work or studies
- have poor work or academic performance
- experience frequent headaches or neck pain/strain
- have persistent failed attempts to use your phone less often
- use your phone when you experience unwanted feelings such as anxiety or sadness
- frequently lose your sense of time
- might lose a relationship or job due to excessive phone use

- \_\_\_ have a strong urge to get the newest phone or add more applications
- \_\_\_ are angry, irritable, depressed, or restless when phone or network is unavailable
- \_\_\_ frequently mindlessly pass time by staring at your phone even though there might be better or more productive things to do
- \_\_\_ spend more time texting, scrolling, tweeting, or emailing instead of talking to people in real life
- \_\_\_ sleep with your phone on or under your pillow or next to your bed
- \_\_\_ view and answer texts, tweets, and emails at all hours of the day and night, even when it means interrupting other things you are doing
- \_\_\_ text, email, tweet, or surf the internet while driving or doing other activities that require your focused attention and concentration
- \_\_\_ ruminate or obsess about social media drama, and you frequently check threads or messages
- \_\_\_ feel an intense urge to check your phone when it rings, beeps, or buzzes
- \_\_\_ total score

This is a list of the most frequent symptoms of phone addiction, and you can see this problem can affect your health and quality of life. If you checked off 5-10 statements, you might want to consider actively reducing your phone usage. If you checked off 11 or more statements, you might want to seek support from a coach or therapist to reduce your phone usage, as you might be addicted to your phone.

How do you know when phone use goes from frequent to excessive? It can be tricky to tell—especially when everyone around you is looking at their phones! Here are warning signs that your phone use is excessive.

**1. You “phub” your family, friends, or partner.** Have you ever observed a group of people hunched over their cell phones? They are together, but apart. This common phenomenon has been called “phubbing.” Maybe you have done this without even realizing it. Even briefly checking your phone during a conversation is a problem because you are signaling to the other person that their presence is less important than checking your device. Phubbing has profound effects on relationships, and it is especially damaging to romantic connections. One study found that phubbing significantly decreased marital satisfaction.

**2. You pick up your phone the minute you wake up.** Do you fall asleep scrolling mindlessly, only to wake up and start again before you get out of bed? Perhaps this has become a habit. It might not seem like a big deal but reaching for your phone first thing puts you into a reactive, instead of a proactive, state.

**3. You are constantly stimulated.** With one click on a device you have access to 24/7, boredom, anxiety, or regret vanishes. You can distract yourself in less than a second, giving your brain a

quick burst of the hormone dopamine so you feel good in the moment. So, you crave even more stimulation to achieve the same effect. Consider the last time you reflected on your thoughts and feelings, unstimulated by media.

**4. You are “nomophobic.”** One of the best ways to assess excessive use is to reflect on how you feel when you do not have access to your phone. “Nomophobia” is the term coined by Iowa State University researchers, and it is short for “no mobile phone phobia.” They studied undergraduate students and identified four different dimensions of nomophobia:

- not being able to communicate
- losing connectedness
- not being able to access information
- giving up convenience

The researchers determined that separation from smartphones can have measurable psychological and physiological effects.

What can you do to spend less time on your phone?

**1. Reorganize or delete applications.** Something as simple as reorganizing the way your applications are displayed can be beneficial. Clean up your phone’s home screen and review all installed apps. Delete or hide time wasters.

**2. Be productive with reclaimed time.** Consciously replace your old phone habits with new ones. For example, instead of liking Instagram pictures of friends outside in nature, go for a run or a hike. Schedule in-person time with your loved ones instead of reading their tweets and online stories.

**3. Avoid bringing your phone into the bedroom.** The phone display’s blue light negatively affects sleep quality. Try to avoid looking at your phone at least two hours before bedtime. Pick up an old-school alarm clock if you use your phone’s alarm to wake up. At bedtime, put your phone in another room. If you cannot do this, keep it out of arm’s reach across the room.

**4. Customize notifications.** Limit notifications so nothing will disturb you from important tasks.

**5. Take a break.** Spend a day or weekend gadget-free. If you worry that loved ones will try to get in touch, notify them about your break and ask to only be contacted in an emergency.

**6. Use apps to limit usage.** There are apps that limit usage and control the time you spend on your phone, such as OffTime, Moment, BreakFree, AppDetox, Stay on Task, and Freedom.

**7. Put your phone away during face-to-face interactions.** Researchers have found that having your phone in sight reduces cognitive capacity. This interferes with social connections, so to increase feelings of closeness, empathy, and connection, put your phone away. If this is too much, start small. Create one manageable rule to follow, like no phones allowed at the dinner table.

**8. Dump the smartphone and use a basic model.** In cases of serious phone addiction, experts recommend using a basic phone for a period of time. The main benefit is the absence of social

media apps. So, you will use the phone to make and receive phone calls. After several weeks, you can get back on your smartphone.

Understanding the severity of your excessive phone use and applying strategies to minimize usage will help you build habits that will enhance your well-being, build relationships, and use your time more productively.

### What to Do

**Create a Plan for Phone Usage.** For one week, use the following chart to record how many apps you use each day and the time spent on each app, and for what purpose. Be as honest as possible. Use additional paper if you need more space. Review the example.

Date	Apps used	Time spent	For what purpose?
11/30	<i>Twitter</i> <i>Instagram</i> <i>Zoom</i> <i>Facebook</i> <i>Telegram</i>	<i>20 minutes</i> <i>15 minutes</i> <i>60 minutes</i> <i>18 minutes</i> <i>7 minutes</i> <i>Total time spent: 120 minutes</i> <i>(2 hours)</i>	<i>catch up on news</i> <i>bored; something to do</i> <i>work meeting</i> <i>waiting at an appointment</i> <i>always check before bed</i>

Date	Apps used	Time spent	For what purpose?

Was your phone usage excessive? Why or why not?

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Were you surprised by the amount of time you spent on your phone each day? \_\_\_\_\_

Experts recommend replacing a bad habit with a good one. If you use your phone excessively, you can replace this habit with healthy ones. For example, you can read a physical book at bedtime instead of scrolling. Write down some things you can do instead of using your phone.

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Are you willing to reduce the time you spend on your phone? Why or why not?

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What is one manageable rule you can stick with to reduce your phone usage?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

What do you think is the primary reason for your phone use? Are you lonely or depressed? Something else? Be specific.

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Did this activity help you reduce your phone usage? \_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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What else can you do to reduce your phone usage?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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