

Words About Wellness

Digital Wellness, Part II

Using your Phone for Mindfulness

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For last issue's Words About Wellness, I wrote about the use of social media, and (mostly negative) effects it can have on your mental health. However, there can be more to the healthy use of computers and smart phones than just avoiding social media. In this article, I'll talk about some positive ways to use our cell phones to work on mindfulness.

What is Mindfulness?

For those of you who have never heard of mindfulness: you are exactly the kind of person who needs to learn about it! Most of the time, we live our lives not really focusing on our current experiences, and not really in touch with the "here and now." You can think of this as being in "automatic pilot" mode. **Mindfulness** is the opposite of this. Being mindful means experiencing what is happening, also known as **being** mode. It has some core features, including **observing** (directly sensing what is happening, rather than separating ourselves by analyzing),

describing (noticing the very fine details of what you are observing), **participating fully** (considering your whole experience without excluding anything), and **being non-judgmental** (accepting one's experience without attempting to place value or control it). Being more mindful can help with management of anxiety, improving various unhelpful and automatic thinking habits, and can improve cognitive functioning. It is a skill that takes time to develop, and some tools can be useful in developing this.

Using smart phones more smarter-ly

Smart phones are not all evil. Yes, they are becoming ubiquitous and changing our culture at a rate far too rapid to anticipate any negative consequences. Yes "smartphone addiction" is becoming rampant. However, you can use them to actually improve your mental health and mindfulness. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Use a mindfulness app.** There are many apps out there for mindfulness. I will not endorse any particular ones, but can describe a few of the more easily available and well-reviewed ones here. Probably the most popular is *Headspace*. This includes activities geared for beginners to learn the basics of meditation. It uses statistics to track your progress, and a buddy system function to reward regular usage and maintain motivation. This can be used offline as well. *The Mindfulness App* is another, with a five-day guided practice and introduction to mindfulness, with personalized meditations available. It also reminds you to be mindful throughout the day and tracks your practice. Finally, *Insight Timer* is a meditation app with timer, bell options, and background sound options specifically for meditation, including guided meditations, mindful activities, discussion groups, and meet-ups.



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2. **Ask yourself mindful questions.** Question your purpose when reaching for the phone. For example, if you check your email first thing when you arrive at work anyway, there is no need to check it while driving at top speed on highway 40 on the way to work. Ask yourself “Will I look at this again soon anyway” or “Do I even have time right now to respond to messages?” If you are trying to tackle of project right now and be productive, your phone may be the best tool for the job. However, if you are using it out of boredom, or looking for support or connection, it is possible that another strategy would be more effective.
3. **Monitor your phone use (non-judgmentally).** One app to do this is called *BreakFree*. This sends you a notification after 10 minutes of continued device use, reminding you to break free to interact with your life. There are other tools, like *Checky*, or you can do it manually. This is all part of being aware of your phone use, and non-judgmentally redirecting yourself.
4. **Tricks with your settings.** More and more smartphone users are setting their phones to *grayscale* (no colors used on any images). Color is known to stimulate our senses and even our emotions, so grayscaling attempts to reduce your phone’s attention-grabbing ability. You can find how to go gray on your phone by Googling it. Another trick is to set a calming wallpaper on your phone, so your lock screen is a reminder to think and stay calm. You can also try making your phone harder to unlock, so that you have to be more mindful when accessing it – try disabling “raise to wake” under “display and brightness” so your screen only lights up when you tell it to. You can also disable notifications for most of your apps, to avoid distractions. Set notifications and text messages to be in your notification history, but NOT on your lock screen as a distraction.



This is just the tip of the iceberg, but a good starting point for a discussion with yourself. Start thinking about how to best use your phone as a tool to improve wellness, rather than a distraction which detracts from it!

The information in this article was based on numerous studies and experience, along with other articles from the following websites:

<https://medium.com/better-humans/a-phone-setup-that-will-make-you-more-mindful-1c5d8be7e661>

<https://leftbrainbuddha.com/5-ways-mindful-using-phone/>

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Other-Resources>

<https://www.brit.co/mindful-phone-usage/>