

Our draw towards phones are the apps not the phone itself. Phone apps rely on the same addictive cycle as slot machines. During this cycle, dopamine is released after a pleasant experience, such as winning, eating something good or a social interaction. Apps create inconsistent social interactions (or stimulations), such as a single text or “like” on social media. These social stimulations cause dopamine to release, which feels good, especially when it is inconsistent. This leads us to literally crave more time with our phones. However, we build up a tolerance to dopamine and need more and more of these social stimulations to get the same effect. What’s more, we can take this social stimulation device anywhere.

The average American spends 7 hours a day looking at a screen. Half of that time is spent on their smart phone. How long do you spend on your phone per day? Here the signs that you might be using your phone more than what is healthy:

Are you having trouble completing tasks?

Are you challenged to feel connected to people in the real world?

Do you get irritated if your online time is interrupted?

Do you conceal your phone by holding it under the table or separate yourself from others to use your phone.

Do you check your phone in the middle of the night?

Do you feel concerned about what you are missing if you do not check your social media.

Do you feel phantom vibrations or hear phantom tones?

Here are some quick strategies you can implement right away to limit your phone usage.

Track your usage. Find out if there are certain times of the day you use it more.

Turn your phone off during certain times of the day. Or commit to not looking at your phone certain times a day.

Buy an alarm clock and leave your phone in another room when you sleep.

Remove apps from your phone that you can use on your computer instead, especially work apps.

Wean your phone checks. Begin with every 15 min to 30 minutes etc.

Be mindful of what mental states or emotions trigger you to reach for your phone. Become mindful of the ways you cope with uncomfortable emotions and mental states. Is looking at your phone the primary way you cope?

Intentionally spend more time with people in person.