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GEAR

Learn to Embrace the Digital Detox

From meditation that lets you shake it off a la Taylor Swift to unplugged weekends that help you deal with smartphone withdrawal, our guide to the digital detox

By **JAVIER ESPINOZA**

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ILLUSTRATION BY PIERLUIGI LONGO

I'M IN A SMALL ROOM, surrounded by total strangers, shaking my body. It's not a nightmare but my eyes are definitely closed. My knees are also slightly bent as I move my arms and upper body to the rhythm of the instrumental New Age music.

I used to think meditation was all about staying still—until today. Joining in everything from gentle swaying to meditative walking, I find the five-hour introductory course at London Meditation (£95; london-meditation.co.uk) both bizarre and entertaining. But with my phone locked away, I actually manage to let go at times, forgetting about the world outside and the incessant urge to check email, Twitter and Instagram.

“With body shaking [meditation], we let go of tension and discomfort in our bodies,” says Susann Herrmann, our teacher and the founder of London Meditation. “Let the body decide what it needs.”

As I let my body shake and shake and shake for over 10 minutes, I start to question my decision to attend. How will I survive five hours? “The mind makes comments like ‘this is not meditation,’ ” says Ms. Herrmann, who was a banker in her native Germany before eventually starting London Meditation with Albert Tobler in 2005. “Shake your thoughts out, drop back to the body and feel.” I’m trying.



A group session of 'laughter yoga' at Unplugged Weekend in Wales. GARETH IWAN-JONES



Caldey Abbey in West Wales offers a respite from the vicissitudes of the modern world. ALAMY

unpluggedweekend.com). At their three-day retreats in the British countryside, participants trade smartphones for smarter life choices: exercise, art and face-to-face conversation, as well as tips and tricks on regaining balance. Life hacks include weaning yourself off social media by logging off sites on multiple platforms and turning off notifications to minimize distractions.

New years are new chances to try the things you never thought you would and the things you always said you would. Increasingly, those include ways to incorporate a little more peace and quiet into our busy lives. But if shaking it off a la Taylor Swift isn't quite your thing, you can still find ways to step back from this digital world without ever missing a beat.

After attending a retreat in the Sahara last year, Lucy Pearson and Vikki Bates came up with the idea for Unplugged Weekend (£250;



A typewriter at Camp Grounded. *BLAZENHOFF INDUSTRIES*

“People don’t think they are addicted to technology because it’s so ingrained in our everyday life,” says Ms. Bates, who sets specific times for checking email. In California, Camp Grounded (campgrounded.org) offers similar experiences.

Niall Campbell, an addiction consultant at London treatment center Priory Hospital, says those concerned about the amount of time they’re spending on

technology should ask themselves a key question: How are the things you’re doing impacting your life?



At California’s Camp Grounded, which describes itself as summer camp for adults, no technology is allowed.

BLAZENHOFF INDUSTRIES

“People don’t often recognize the effect their behavior has on them and those around them,” says Mr. Campbell. He concedes that identifying an addiction to technology is

difficult, but adds that “as the access to technology becomes easier, it will become more apparent.” At Priory, Internet addiction treatment for those with significant issues includes an individual rehabilitation program that costs around £1,500 for 10 to 15 sessions. (priorygroup.com)

THE GUIDE // CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

How many times have you checked your phone today? Chances are it's more than you'd expect (after all, you do live in the 21st century). Here, three easy ways to monitor—and decrease—your usage.

Phone Addict: This easy-to-use Android app monitors the time you spend on a portable device (tablet or phone). It tracks historical use as well as maximum use on a particular day—showing you just how glued to your phone you are. For added accountability, there's also a tool that allows you to share the extent of your addiction with others on social media—though it doesn't yet allow for comparisons with other users. *Free; play.google.com*

Moment: This iOS app allows you to monitor how many times you pick up your iPhone or iPad each day and provides a breakdown of when you're on your device. You can set a daily usage limit—anything from 5 minutes to 6 hours—and the app will send you a message alerting you if you've gone past it. These can get annoying if you've exceeded your limit substantially—which, I suppose, means it's doing its job. There is a drawback, however. The app needs to track the places you go to track your phone use, which means considerable battery consumption. *£2.99; itunes.apple.com*

Nophone: This isn't an app but an actual phone—or rather, a nophone. Meant to work as a substitute for any mobile device, it has the shape and look of a smartphone. But in reality, it's just a piece of plastic for you to hold. Addiction proof, it will save you from having to constantly look for a power socket. *\$12; nophone.myshopify.com*

If checking yourself into a clinic seems too drastic, a trip to a monastery might be your ticket to unplugging this year. In Wales, Caldey Abbey's St. Philomena guesthouse (caldey-island.co.uk) offers a respite from the vicissitudes of the modern world. Open from Easter until October, the retreat center on Caldey Island keeps in line with Cistercian practices: visitors are asked to work, helping clean up and making their

beds, and payment is by donation.

At Assisi Retreats in Italy, you can sign up for six-day guided or self-guided retreats at the four-star country villa. The program includes morning and evening meditation, with time in the day to head into town, where reminders of that great contemplative, St. Francis, abound. The four guest rooms are available on a first-come, first-serve basis, and meals aren't included. (*From €635 for guided retreat with accommodation; assisiretreats.org*)

But you don't have to travel miles to reassess your relationship with technology. Some of the most effective ways to digitally detox are, not surprisingly, the simplest: Buy an old-fashioned alarm clock, take a bath, switch to paper (remember those things we call books?), play a game.



Assisi Retreat in Italy offers six-day guided or self-guided retreats at the four-star country villa. *ANDREA ANGELUCCI*

After attending Unplugged Weekend last summer, Berni Britton says she's cut back on the time she spends on her phone. "I don't text people straight back," she says, "and we play board games or talk more in the house."

Back at London Meditation, I haven't heard the ding of a text arriving in hours. But I'm

feeling less anxious about the lack of constant updates. I find the silent break, where we eat snacks and drink tea on our own, utterly refreshing and my fears of five hours becoming an eternity have faded. In fact, I'm surprised at how quickly time passes as we're guided through this taster course on meditation. As we get ready to leave, Ms. Herrmann sends us off with some advice: "You shouldn't do body shaking in public." No worries there. The second I'm out the door, I check my phone. No messages.

Addicted to Technology? Four Classic Types of Over-Users

THE OVERSHARER



ILLUSTRATION BY PIERLUIGI LONGO

Diagnosis: My dog just barked! My cat just meowed. :) ;) <3 The oversharer seems to have no internal filter, posting anything and everything that crosses their mind almost instantly. They are also very fond of sharing the results of the latest online quiz they've taken, from "What country should you live in?" to "What 'Frozen' character

are you?"

Remedy: Out of all the online addicts, these need the most help. Remove smartphone and other devices—prying them from their hands if necessary—until they seek medical attention.

THE LIKER

Diagnosis: Liking everything on Facebook and Instagram, or favoriting tweet after tweet can become an addiction. It's just so good and so easy! From a link about the latest burger joint to open to random posts from childhood friends they haven't seen since 1981, the liker will like it every time.

Remedy: Every time you hit that Like button, put aside a dollar. At the end of the week, give all the money to the person you like the least.

THE REFRESHER

Diagnosis: In a constant state of expectation, the refresher can't help checking their work inbox incessantly. At home, it's no better; phone in hand wherever they are, they tap Mail, Twitter, Instagram and news feeds in an endless cycle. Online, they refresh and refresh pages as if some big news or something out of this world is about to happen. The sad reality is it rarely does.



ILLUSTRATION BY PIERLUIGI LONGO

Remedy: Stop, in the name of love, before you break your phone. Think it o-o-ver.

THE COMMENTATOR

Diagnosis: Can't see a Facebook post without adding a comment? Feel the need to be the first to made a witty statement about that cute cat dressed like a giraffe? Just HAVE to share the best video in the whole entire world?

Then we're talking to you. Sadly, you're too busy commenting to notice.

Remedy: Next time you feel like you have to comment on a post, pinch yourself (hard).

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