

With a focus on mental health and resiliency this year, there was no way we could avoid taking on screen time and social media. We've all read the headlines, [social media is linked to depression](#), [apps are physically addictive](#), constant media consumption is [making everyone angry!](#)

We're spending on average 4-5 hours per day on our phones.

"But, but Elizabeth," you say, "some of that time is well spent! Texting friends, FaceTiming grandparents, or checking the weather (I must know the exact temperature or how can I live?!)." "

I hear you.

But how many times have you gone to send a quick text and ended up scrolling through Instagram or TikTok before your brain even knew what you were doing? How many times have you looked up from your phone to find 15 minutes have passed when you meant to look at one thing? The muscle memory, reward/pleasure programming in our brains and thumbs is incredible!

Have you ever said to yourself, I *want* to exercise more, get better sleep, cook healthier food, spend more time on creative activities, take up that new hobby, I just don't have time! I'm so busy!!

But, you spend 4-5 hours on your phone EVERY DAY. Go ahead, pull up your screen time on your phone right now and look at the last week. No seriously, I'll wait. What's your average?

What if you could have even 1-2 of those hours back? What could you do with that time? 2 hours extra every day! Would you go to bed 30 minutes earlier? Would you build a daily exercise habit? Would you spend more present time with your family and friends? Would you cure cancer?! (probably)

How it affects your brain

Let's talk a little about the physical effects of phones on our brains.

- [Triggers a stress response with every notification](#) - Your body reacts to your phone with cortisol, the stress hormone. This happens when your phone is in sight, nearby or even when you think you hear it! Think how many cortisol spikes that is causing! Elevated cortisol (stress) over time can lead to [all kinds of problems](#): [depression](#), [obesity](#), [metabolic syndrome](#), [Type 2 diabetes](#), [fertility issues](#), [high blood pressure](#), [dementia](#), [heart attack, and stroke](#). To name a few.
- [Triggers a dopamine hit](#) - Which makes it super addictive. You reach for it without meaning to because your brain just wants another hit.

- [Lowers creative ability](#) - Science fiction writer Ray Bradbury once observed that “Ideas are like cats. You can’t call them up. If they come, it’s because it’s their choice. Not yours.” When your brain is never in a relaxed, dreamlike, almost bored state, those ideas will not come. Nevermind that with 4 hours a day on your phone, it’s hard to find time to create.
- [Lazy brain](#) - Rather than spend even a minute or two trying to think of an answer, we will outsource that to our phones. Even when it’s something we do know! This has lasting effects on our ability to focus, memory, and general cognitive strength.
- [Messess with circadian rhythm](#) - This is one we all know. Blue light suppresses melatonin production later in the day, which you need to fall asleep and stay asleep at night. But did you know this can also lead to lower cortisol levels in the morning? This makes it harder to get up, and causes you to reach for things that will raise your energy levels, like coffee, or your phone, or sugary breakfast foods.

Who is this challenge for?

If any of these apply to you, you need to do this challenge:

- You take your phone with you everywhere, even into the bathroom
- You look at your phone first thing in the morning
- You repeatedly check your phone even when no notifications have come in
- You never turn off your phone, or leave the house without it
- You feel anxiety if your phone runs out of battery, or even when you get the low battery notice
- You hear phantom notifications or feel phantom phone vibrations (hypervigilance)
- Your phone is the last thing you look at before bed
- You just want to spend less time on your phone

The challenge

Your challenge is to spend 2 hours less on your phone every day for 2 weeks. Look at your average over the last week and subtract 2 hours. That’s your target number for this challenge.

Do not freak out on me, it’s just 2 weeks. I know you can do this!

The challenge runs from Monday, August 1st - Sunday, August 14th. You will self-report days when you are at your target phone usage in [this spreadsheet](#). Start by putting your target number in the sheet next to your name. Then each day report the number from the previous day, to make sure you’ve captured the full hours!

Go to Settings > Screen time > See All Activity. Then click on “day” so you can see your use for that day.

Ways to cut back your phone time. Aka how the heck are we going to do this?!

So much of our phone use is *unconscious*. To set yourself up for success and reprogram your conscious and subconscious habits, you will need some of these tricks!

- **Do not have your phone in your bedroom.** This will help with use before bed and first thing in the morning. The morning is key here, if you start your day with the addictive hit, you will keep reaching for it again and again throughout the day. Don't fight me on this one, you can do it. **You do not need your phone by your bed for whatever you're going to tell me you need it for.** You don't.
- **Use the tools in your phone** to limit yourself. Schedule downtime (a lot of downtime!), set app limits, turn off notifications. Get a time tracker app that will force quit things for you. There are many technologies meant to help us avoid technology!
- **Delete apps entirely for these 2 weeks.** What sucks you in? Instagram? TikTok? YouTube? News? Delete it from your phone, change your password and make it hard to sign back in. Come back in 2 weeks. I promise you, it will all still be there.
- **Lock up your phone.** Literally. Put it somewhere hard to get, you will be surprised how a little [inconvenience](#) can help you reach your goals. Bury it in a closet, put it on the other side of the house, lock it in a safe. Make it hard to pick up.
- **Plan social interactions** - You've got two weeks of time to fill, spend it in person with friends or family. Make some fun plans you'll look forward to and then leave your phone at home.
- **Plan other activities** - When do you scroll the most? Plan something else for that time! Do you scroll while watching TV at night? Get a fidget toy, coloring book, or knit during that time. Fill your hands so you're not reaching for it. Do you scroll at night before sleep? Get a book (or several!) for the challenge to be your pre-sleep read.
- **Be proactive** - What do you use your phone for? Plan ahead so you don't need it. Use recipes from a cookbook, get directions on your computer and memorize them (yes you can!!), use your computer to look things up, or just wonder about something and don't look it up at all! Know that legitimate uses of your phone will lead to unconscious tapping and scrolling so try to avoid any use you can.
- **Nature!** Nature is the ultimate distraction. Plan time outside **without** your phone every day during this challenge. Long stretches are even better. Picnic dinners, long morning walks. And leave your phone at home! Maybe dig out that old iPod if you need music.

Prize!!

This one is going to be hard! But the benefits are huge too. You will have extra time every day, and how you choose to use it is up to you. No algorithm will decide what you should spend time on for these two weeks!

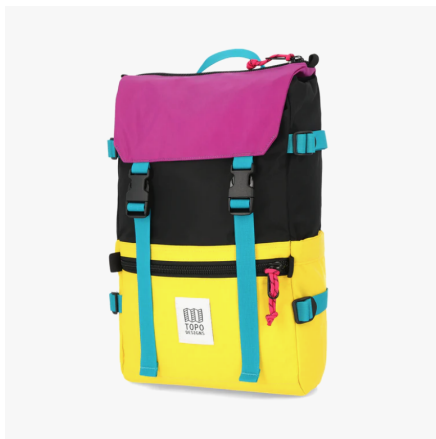
Will you be more present in important moments with your family? Will you spend time on your favorite hobby? Or maybe you'll even see some benefits to your sleep, or ability to focus. Maybe time away from social media, or news scrolling will begin to change your outlook on the world.

But if that's not enough, there's also a really cool prize!

Everyone who completes the 2 week challenge will get this [extremely cool back pack](#) in the color of your choice. There are so many colors to choose from!

Go look now, pick out your color and get excited about it! Consider printing a picture of the pack you want and taping it to your phone as a reminder of what you're giving up if you pick that phone up.

This pack will be great for getting outside and away from your phone in the future!



We always aspire to choose challenge prizes that are motivating and playful and can be enjoyed by all persons on our team. If you'd like to work with us 1:1 to adjust any prize option, or have general feedback, please let Elizabeth or Erin know!

OK....who's in?!

What color pack are you getting?