

DO YOU find it impossible to sit on a train, in a bar or even watch TV without checking your phone? Do you spend hours a day gaming? Do you worry about missing out if you don't check social media every few minutes?

These are all indications of digital or tech addiction, a fast-growing problem in the UK that has been linked to unprecedented levels of stress and isolation as well as sleep issues.

The Allen Carr books that have helped millions bust smoking, boozing, caffeine, stress and a host of other psychological issues are now helping people deal with that mesmerising little screen...

ARE YOU ADDICTED?

Addiction doesn't have to be a substance, like nicotine or alcohol. It can be based in a behaviour. And digital addiction is the new kid on the block.

Most digital users don't even realise they are being controlled by their devices but you may have a suspicion.

If you want to stop getting that phone out but you can't or it's extremely difficult and requires all your willpower, then you're hooked.

HOW DID YOU GET HOOKED?

Addiction is tied up with negative emotions. Stress, depression, fear, heartbreak, loneliness and boredom are just some of the feelings that will drive people to seek comfort.

If you think you can find it in digital devices, normally via social media and gaming, that's what you'll turn to.

You may not realise it, as you reply to a message or count the "likes" on your post, that the small sense of gratification you feel could tip you into addiction.

SO WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

What does it mean to stop? Are you supposed to spend the rest of your life free of digital devices? Of course not. Taking control of your digital life means using it when you genuinely need or want to and putting your phone or tablet down happily once you're done.

BANISH THE BRAINWASHING

It's easy to believe constant use of digital devices and apps is necessary if you want to keep up with modern life. And it's very difficult to live without devices as there are few jobs left that don't rely on computers, phones and tablets.

On top of that, your phone, email and social media have become how you connect with the world.

But when they become constant sources of intrusion, demanding attention every second, you

“Put your phone down, close your eyes and notice the peace. Think of it like a screwdriver – a tool designed for certain jobs”

connected life without your phone. The challenge, as with every addiction, is to reverse the brainwashing.

BE HAPPY, NOT TOTALLY APPY

What sort of digital user do you want to be? Think about how you want to feel and write it down.

For example: "I want to feel less badgered by my phone."

Put your phone aside, close your eyes and notice the peace. Imagine yourself as a happy digital user, able to put your phone down and only look at it when you really need to.

Think of it like a screwdriver – a tool designed for certain jobs. There's nothing exciting about it but it

practical and useful and which are addictive junk by going through your phone and sorting them into two lists.

Useful apps include: maps, music, banking, weather, transport, shopping and communication tools such as video calling and text messaging.

The real junk will stick out like a sore thumb.

This is also a good time to think about WhatsApp and Facebook groups. Do you need to be in so many of them?

Don't worry about people taking offence if you leave a group, just explain you're trying to cut the number you're in and they can send you a message if they want to get in touch.

REMOVE ALL

yourself and your family. The little boost you feel every time you reach for your phone is a mere hint of how you will feel all the time when you're free.

Once you can see that digital junk does nothing positive for you, you'll realise you have everything to gain and nothing to lose by quitting.

FORGET FEAR OF MISSING OUT

You might worry that living the rest of your life without your usual fixes will be miserable and boring.

But the truth is your addiction actually reduces your ability to derive pleasure or excitement from anything. Once you're back in control and you're not turning to devices for emotional reasons, exposure to digital junk won't be a problem.

You won't be interested in it and

spend on screens. Nearly everyone underestimates their daily phone usage and for digital addicts it can be by as much as half.

So if you think you spend 90 minutes on your phone each day, chances are it's more like three hours.

PAUSE AND PAY ATTENTION

When you go to look at your phone, pay attention to how you're feeling and ask: "Do I really need to look at my phone now? Will it give me satisfaction? What am I expecting to gain?"

These questions allow you to pause, interrupting the impulsive, mindless use that is symptomatic of digital addiction.

Think about how each app you use or group you're in makes you feel – good or bad, stimulated or numb

BREAK YOUR PHONE ADDICTION FOR GOOD!

The Allen Carr method of dealing with addictions like smoking and drinking has sold millions of books over the last 30 years. Now these experts focus on tackling our obsession with screens and digital devices

turn off notifications and remove it from your home screen. Then, treat your email like regular mail, if it had three deliveries a day.

Schedule a time for reading and replying to emails in the morning, at lunchtime and at the end of the day.

For the rest of the time, ignore it. This scheduled approach will make you much more efficient as you'll be answering emails in blocks rather than in dribs and drabs.



DUMP THOSE NOTIFICATIONS

All apps can send you "push" notifications, regardless of whether you're using the app or not.

These can be dangerous if you don't stop them.

They are not only distracting but will keep you hooked, because it's hard to resist looking to see what the notification says.

Look in the settings section of your device and disable push notifications one by one.

This will rid you of one of the most intrusive aspects of digital devices.

ENJOY YOUR HAPPY HOUR

"Happy hour" is the 60 minutes before you go to sleep, which should be spent doing other things than looking at screens.

It will make you happy because it enables you to get a good night's sleep.

The blue light emitted by screens fools your brain into thinking it's still daytime, which suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin.

If you spend the time before you go to bed staring at your phone, your brain won't be ready for sleep and you'll have a restless night.

Observing happy hour will make a big difference to your mental and physical wellbeing.

GET A WATCH

How many times do you check your phone simply to learn the time? Go old school and get a watch. It's a great way to avoid looking unnecessarily at your phone.



OLD SCHOOL Buy a watch

NOW YOU'RE READY...

These practical instructions can help you escape digital addiction.

Follow them with an open mind and you will make your digital experience an altogether more peaceful, relaxed and fulfilling one.

You'll be aware of how your devices affect you and most of all, you will enjoy the