

Your shout

Get a life! Put the phone away and experience the real world



Do you need to 'digital detox' your life? **Misia Smith**, of West Bridgford, says it's crucial that we do



Are you never off your phone, even at the table?

THERE'S no doubt that technology has changed the way we live. But has it changed it for the better?

I think back to the 70s when I was a young kid at school drawing futuristic pictures of flying cars and telephones.

We talked of technology giving us more leisure time. But has it really?

Don't get me wrong, it still amazes me that I can talk to my son and see his face at the same time.

But it's what this technology is doing to us socially and physically that bothers me.

■ *Spoiling relationships.* It saddens me to see couples, families and friends sitting in a restaurant, supposedly there to enjoy each other's company, staring at a phone. Detached from conversation, no eye contact and very little genuine, heartfelt interaction.

How did we get to a point where scrolling through our Facebook status takes priority over nurturing our relationships? What do we think we're going to miss if we put our phones down? Life's too short. Get a grip and make time for life.

■ *We're losing our kids.* I don't know about you but it hurts and worries me that our kids are living their lives by the activity on their phone. No matter how much I nag my son that he spends too much time on his phone, he still does it. It's a way of life now; they don't know anything else. Gone are the days of innocence, imaginative play, calling for friends (I mean physically walking round and knocking on the door) and being active and happy. They waste life scrolling, watching worthless videos, sending embarrassing, pouty, posed images to each

other. And homework takes twice as long because they're being constantly distracted by inane rubbish.

■ *No one has any time any more.* To say technology was supposed to free up time for us, I think we've failed miserably. It's not just kids constantly "on tap", it seems we need 24-hour access to work emails and text messages. We don't seem to have working hours any more, because we were always working. Except we're not paid to read

that email at 3am when we're lying awake worrying about what needs to be done for work.

■ *It's increasing our stress levels.* And it's been clinically proven that stress causes disease. The constant vibrating alerts and notifications put us on edge, even if we don't realise it. Recent research in Sweden has shown that high mobile phone use was associated with stress and sleep disturbances in women and

sleep disturbances and depression in men. Ever noticed your sleep has worsened?

■ *Digital strain.* Because our phone screens are smaller than our PC screens, we tend to squint more. Not only can this repetitive action exacerbate frown lines, it can strain your eyes, causing problems with vision in later life. And we're increasing our risk of chronic pain and inflammation in our hands with holding our phones and

our rapid texting and emailing.

At the end of the day, I think we need to take a long, hard look at how our mobile use is affecting our relationships and our wellbeing. We can start by putting our phones away whilst we eat together. Pay attention to our precious ones; one day, we may look up from our phones and they won't be there any more.

Enjoy your social occasions through your eyes, not your lens. Be in the moment! Let happy times register in your brain as a memory instead of relying on your phone to capture it and losing it when you upgrade your phone.

Leave your phone behind whilst you nip to the shops or go to the gym. Ease yourself away from that constant worry that you might miss something.

Think back to the old days. We coped. Important news arrived. We didn't miss anything. And I reckon we'd have been pretty horrified if we'd had a glimpse of the superficial, and stressful future that lay ahead for us.

Switch off and enjoy a technology-free day



Dr Mark Griffiths, a psychologist at Nottingham Trent University, offers his advice on spending less time with technology



Limit the times you look at your laptop or tablet.

weekends (eg, not accessing the internet at all for 24 hours).

■ *Only respond to emails and texts at specific times of the day.* Very few individuals are "on call" 24/7. Try looking at emails at just three times a day (9am, 1pm, 4pm) and you'll save lots of time in the long run. Turning off email and social media, disabling

push notifications, or simply turning the volume setting to silent on electronic devices will also reduce your urge to constantly check mobile devices.

■ *Don't use your smartphone or tablet as an alarm clock.* By using a standard alarm clock to wake you in the morning, you'll avoid the temptation to look at emails

and texts just as you're about to go to sleep or when you wake up.

■ *Engage in out-of-work activities where it is impossible (or frowned upon) to use technology.* Leisure activities such as going to the pub, cinema or restaurant don't stop people using technology. By engaging in digitally incompatible activities where it's impossible to access technology simultaneously (eg, jogging, swimming, meditation, outdoor walks in wi-fi free areas) or going to places where technology is frowned upon (places of worship, yoga classes, etc) you'll automatically decrease your amount of screen time. In social situations, you can turn people's need to check their phones into a game. For instance, in the pub with friends, the first one to check their phone has to buy a round of drinks for everyone else.

■ *Tell your work colleagues*

and friends you are going on a digital detox. Checking emails and texts can become an almost compulsive behaviour because of what psychologists have termed FOMO (fear of missing out) that refers to the anxiety that an interesting or exciting event may be happening elsewhere online. By telling everyone you know that you'll not be online for a few hours, they'll be less likely to contact you in the first place and you'll be less likely check for online messages.

■ *Enjoy the silence.* Too many people fail to appreciate being in the moment and allowing themselves to resist the urge to check emails and text messages. It is at these times that some people might interpret as boredom that we can contemplate and be mindful. This could be made more formal by introducing meditation into a daily routine.

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RESearch has suggested that we now spend more time online than we do sleeping, and that the number of problematic internet and mobile phone users is increasing.

A "digital detox" refers to individuals giving up their electronic devices (smartphones, tablets, computers) as a way of reducing stress and/or focusing on social interaction in the real world.

I have to admit that I often find it hard to switch off from work (mainly because I love my job). However, here are my top tips for helping you to decrease the amount of time you spend interacting with technology:

■ *Digitally detox in*

increments. Are you a person who cannot go a few minutes without checking your smartphone or email? For many of us, the urge is reflexive and habitual. Start by proving to yourself that you can go 15 minutes without technology. Over time, increase the length of time without checking (say) Twitter, Facebook and emails until you get into a daily habit of being able to spend a few hours without the need to be online.

■ *Set aside daily periods of self-imposed non-screen time.* One of the secrets to cutting down screen time is to keep aside certain times of the day technology-free (such as family meals). Another strategy to try is having a technology-free day at the