



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

ARE YOU A NOMOPHOBIAC? HOW TO IDENTIFY AND TREAT SMARTPHONE ADDICTION

Smartphones have become an important part of our lives. We use them for emergencies, GPS tracking, entertainment, to access apps, read the news, keep up with friends and family and make phone calls. Smartphones keep us in tune and in touch. They have become as essential to our lives as breathing. But have they become too essential?



HAVE YOU USED YOUR PHONE IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES?

- over dinner
- in a movie theatre
- while driving
- in the shower
- in church
- at a child's school function
- on a dinner date
- during sex

If so, you might be a smartphone addict, or even a nomophobic (suffering from no-mobile-phobia, the fear of being away from your phone).

The effects of smartphone overuse run the gamut from social and neurological dysfunctions to safety issues that can result in accidents and even death. It could be a side effect of depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder. How can something that seems so essential and so harmless become harmful? If you are more interested in engrossing yourself in the world of your smartphone than in real life, it may be time to take a step back.

HERE ARE SOME SIGNS THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE NOMOPHOBIA.

- Phantom vibrations. We are so much in anticipation of some kind of smartphone interaction that we imagine the sensation of a vibration.
- Feeling anxious whenever you do not have your phone in your physical possession.
- Constantly checking the phone for new texts, coupled with the compulsion to respond immediately.
- You're not listening. In fact, you have no idea what the person in front of you is talking about. Why? Because you keep checking your Facebook page, tweets and texts.
- Failing in School. Poor grades can often be blamed on using the smartphone in classes. There are apps that block social media, which may help.
- While running to the store, you realize halfway there that you forgot your phone and you MUST turn around to get it.

TREATING NOMOPHOBIA

Here are a few common-sense guidelines to make sure using your smartphone doesn't hurt you:

- Do not text while driving. It is considered six-times more dangerous than drunk driving, and in most jurisdictions, it is punishable by heavy fines and other penalties. If you need to text, do it before or after you drive. Risking your life just to give a quick response is beyond foolish.
- Don't take your phone to the bathroom. Most bathrooms are receptacles for vast amounts of germs that could be transferred to your phone. Even if you wash your hands, once you start handling your germ-riddled phone again, it defeats the purpose. Also, no one the other end likes to hear a toilet flush.
- Check your phone use in public. When you are in line at the bank or when you step up to the counter to order or check out, put the phone down and take care of business. There are customers behind you and they don't want to hear your conversation. This is especially true in the Express Lane.
- Same goes for that period between the time you take your seat in an airplane and the rest of the passengers board. End your conversation the moment you board the plane
- No phone use during sex. It is rude and probably unsafe. It may also violate your partner's privacy.
- Don't bring your phone to bed, no matter how badly you want to check your messages or buy something on Amazon just before closing your eyes. Shut it down and get some shut eye. Staring at a screen prevents the brain from releasing something that is called melatonin, our natural sleep chemical. As a result, our bodies don't register that we are tired.
- When you're with friends, turn your phone off and try interacting face to face. Just try it.
- If you're on a date, come to a mutual agreement that you each will only check your phones every 90 minutes, both at the same time, and for five minutes only.

When you're able to manage the above without suffering a panic attack, shortness of breath or dizziness, then take the next step: try leaving the phone at home when you go out. Work up to spending a day without it. You could start by turning off your phone at certain times of the day – for example during meetings, during dinner or while playing with your kids. Try weaning yourself to 15 minute intervals at set times of the day when it won't affect work or family life. Remove social media apps, including Facebook and Twitter from your phone, and check them only from your laptop. Your ultimate goal should be to try to replace your smart device time with healthier activities such as meditating or actually interacting with real people.

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