

# MOBILE MENTAL WELLNESS

## DIGITAL DETOX – GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

Inviting technology into our lives can often make life easier, but we also know there are many risks to our physical and mental wellness that come along with excessive use. The conversation is usually centered around the lack of quality in our relationships, the disruption in communication, or the effect on our attention span. There is another aspect that is concerning, however, and it has nothing to do with what technology can make available to us, but rather with the mechanics of technology itself.

### THE DANGER OF BLUE LIGHT



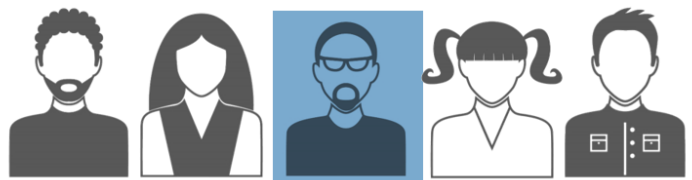
It used to be that our activities were ruled by the natural light of day. Our work was scheduled around when the sun rose and set. Over time, we learned that the sun, a beautiful source of light, can also have damaging effects on our health. We now protect our eyes with sunglasses and our skin with sunscreen to counteract the well-known dangers of UV light. Today, artificial forms of light are everywhere, and unfortunately, they don't always enhance our lives. Blue light associated with digital devices like televisions, tablets, and smartphones doesn't only affect our eyes, but can have damaging effects on our health.

**Did you know that long-term exposure to blue light is linked to mood disorders, depression, and chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and cancer?!**

Circadian rhythm is the natural cycle of physical, mental, behavioural, and biological changes that your body goes through over a 24-hour period. These changes are affected and regulated by the balance of light and darkness. Nighttime light exposure affects the production of melatonin, the hormone that helps you sleep. Studies, however, show that blue light particularly suppressed melatonin twice as long and shifted circadian rhythm by twice as much. Sleep disturbance is a contributing factor to mood disorders and is also a symptom of depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety.

#### Did You Know?

1 in 5 Canadians report not having gone more than 8 hours without being connected to the internet. That's a lot of time spent online!



In the past, when we discussed limiting screen time, it related to the amount of tv our kids were watching and its relationship to obesity. Today, screen time relates to anyone, of any age, at any time, and is linked to so many more dangers than obesity! We are bombarded with emails, text messages, notifications, alarms, and a constant need to engage. Just as our exposure to blue light increases with the number of devices used and the length of time that we are using them, so does our overstimulation! Our brains are being trained to deal with a fast-paced, digital world filled with noise, clutter, and multitasking, and it isn't always able to cope. Neuroscientist, Dr. Daniel Levitin, author of *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information*, reports that multitasking leads to anxiety because of the increase of the hormone, cortisol, in the brain. It removes our ability to focus and give attention to singular tasks at hand. Are your brain and body exhausted trying to keep up with the demands of a technology-driven, modern-day life? Probably.



## GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

You don't have to be dealing with anxiety, depression or mood disorders to benefit from a break! It can give us all the ability to enjoy the reality of the present.

It's time for a digital detox! Are you up for the challenge? The urge to grab your phone will linger, but be patient with yourself. All change takes time.

### Limit Screen Time.

Set screen-free zones at home, set a timer when using social media, commit to a time in the evening when devices are shut off or set to silent mode. Consider blocking your use with an app! You control your screen time - don't let it control you.

### Purchase a Blue Light Filter.

Sometimes it is necessary to remain connected at night. Be honest with how necessary this might be. Protect yourself from the damaging effects of blue light by using a screen filter or blue light glasses.

### Get Outside.

Having difficulty breaking the habit? Out of sight, out of mind! Take a digital break by getting outside for a calming, multi-sensory experience.

### Find a Tech-Free Hobby.

There's an app for that, but it doesn't mean you need to use it. Join a community class, read a book with your morning coffee, or do a crossword before bed. There are plenty of activities to engage in.

### Allow for Blank Space.

Think twice before you grab your phone at the bus stop or while waiting in line at the grocery store. During moments of quiet, allow your brain to rest and your imagination to wander, or connect with a fellow bystander!

**Sources** [health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/blue-light-has-a-dark-side](http://health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/blue-light-has-a-dark-side)  
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