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How to Change a Media Use Habit

Review these ideas on how to change media habits and write your goal or adaptations below each.

Identify the bad habit you want to change. Knowing that a habit is having negative effects helps give motivation to change it. Be clear about what you want to change, then set an alarm on your phone to remind you throughout the day, or write it on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror. Start with a small, realistic goal: If your ultimate plan is to use your smartphone a total of only two hours each day, a good place to start is with not checking your phone for 15 minutes. You can add five-minute increments as you get better at your new “habit” of phone intermissions.

Notice what triggers your use. If you check your phone when nervous or in socially awkward situations, replace that tendency with a realistic alternative. Practice deep-breathing exercises while waiting in a fast food line. Work on your memory by trying to recall all the kinds of shoes people around you are wearing without looking at their feet. Look for others not on their phones and strike up a conversation—about not being on your phones. Learn to tolerate being bored.

Change your routine. This may help reset those automatic movements. Tips include: Don't use your phone as an alarm clock. Put your phone in the next room. Turn off notifications. Unfollow people who constantly virtually tap you on the shoulder for attention. Get an app to help you resist the temptation to go online. Get another to track your online time.

Tell others. Sharing your goal allows friends and colleagues to support you *and* keep you accountable. In the case of the goal of reduced smartphone use, tell your support team to reign in the mindless texts and bored memes they send you.

Expect setbacks but not failure. You'll slip into the old "bad" habit because it's a habit. That's expected. But don't give up. Motivation is essential to changing a routine.

Replacement. Replace the media use with something *equally engaging* that isn't related to your habit. If you like to binge-watch streaming video after a long day, then anticipate this temptation to stream away the evening online and instead plan to go for a walk, play sports, connect with friends or try a new recipe. You could shock your BFF and read a book.

Reward yourself. After reaching your first small goal, treat yourself to a short-term reward. Download a new song as your ringtone. Get a snack with friends. Blow off your least-favorite chore.

Sources: Christian, 2024; Devine et al., 2012; Jager, 2003; Greenfield, 2017



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