

7 reasons to offer digital detox at your spa

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We spend a lot of time looking at screens and consuming media. Is a digital detox in order? Here are 7 reasons to make this an option at your spa.

Detox your mind

Should your spa be offering digital detox options, be it a full day a month, an hour a week, or specific areas of your property? Here's why you might consider this compelling option if you're not already doing so.

We spend a lot of time looking at screens and, whether we all agree on this or not, it would be hard to argue that there isn't some form of addiction happening. Have you ever told yourself to put your phone down and promise yourself you're not going to pick it up again for a few hours only to find yourself looking at it 10 minutes later? Us too. Over and over again.

According to data from DataReportal, the average American spends seven hours and four minutes looking at a screen every day, while a 2018 survey by the Nielsen Company found that the average U.S. adult was spending around 11 hours each day listening to, watching, reading, or interacting with media.

And this has been associated with a variety of negative mental health outcomes, including sleep problems, stress, and more. Research has found heavy technology use to be associated with the following five outcomes:

1. Depression, anxiety, OCD, ADHD and alcohol use disorder

Heavy mobile phone use is associated with psychiatric, cognitive, emotional, medical and brain changes.

“[Excessive smartphone use is associated with] depression, anxiety, OCD, ADHD and alcohol use disorder...difficulties in cognitive-emotion regulation, impulsivity, impaired cognitive function, addiction to social networking, shyness and low self-esteem. Medical problems include sleep problems, reduced physical fitness, unhealthy eating habits, pain and migraines, reduced cognitive control and changes in the brain’s gray matter volume.”

2. Reduced sleep quantity and quality and increased body mass index.

High use of devices in children, particularly close to bedtime, was linked to reduced sleep quantity and quality and with increased body mass index.

“Using any device at bedtime was associated with a statically significant increased use of multiple forms of technology at bedtime and use in the middle of the night, reducing sleep quantity and quality...A statistically significant association was found between bedtime technology use and elevated body mass index.”

3. Sleep and mood dysfunction

Using social media in bed is associated with sleep and mood dysfunction and increased likelihood of anxiety and insomnia in adults.

“Compared with participants with no in-bed ESM (electronic social media) use and controlling for age, gender, and ethnicity, participants with high in-bed ESM use were more likely to have insomnia, anxiety, and short sleep duration on weeknights.”

4. Smiling less

Strangers smiled less at one another when they had their phones in a waiting room.

“Compared to participants without smartphones, participants with smartphones exhibited significantly fewer smiles of any kind and fewer genuine (Duchenne) smiles. These findings are based on objective behavioral coding rather than self-report and provide clear evidence that being constantly connected to the digital world may undermine important approach behavior.”

5. More severe anxiety, depression and negative affectivity

Social media use has also been connected to FOMO, also known as fear of missing out, which has in turn [been associated with](#) more severe anxiety, depression and negative affectivity, and lower levels of perceived quality of life.

The mere presence of a smartphone makes you dumber

Reason #6 is that we don't even have to be using our phones for some of these effects to be seen. They just have to be available to us.

Strong and [consistent evidence](#) has been found of an association between the use of devices, *or merely the access to them*, and reduced sleep quantity and quality, as well as increased daytime sleepiness.

“[Twenty studies involving] 125 198 children found a strong and consistent association between bedtime media device use and inadequate sleep quantity, poor sleep quality, and excessive daytime sleepiness. In addition, *children who had access to (but did not use) media devices at night* were more likely to have inadequate sleep quantity, poor sleep quality, and excessive daytime sleepiness.”

Another study found similar but different results in adults. Study participants took a [series of tests](#) geared to measure participants' available cognitive capacity. Before beginning, participants were randomly instructed to place their smartphones either on the desk face down, in their pocket or personal bag, or in another room. All participants were instructed to turn their phones to silent. Participants with their phones in another room significantly outperformed those with their phones on the desk, and they also slightly outperformed those participants who had kept their phones in a pocket or bag.

The authors conclude “The findings suggest that the mere presence of one's smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity and impairs cognitive functioning, even though people feel they're giving their full attention and focus to the task at hand.”

Let's not get carried away. Technology is still amazing.

Not all smartphone and screen use is bad, of course. There are wonderful applications for technology and there are study findings that refute the findings above. There will always be fear mongering around new technologies, back through the invention of television and radio, all the way back to the printing press, when 16th Century Swiss scientist, Conrad Gessner, apparently expressed serious concerns around the dangers of information overload and the overabundance of available books.

Technology is still amazing and allows us to do incredible things, access mind blowing amounts of information, and better understand ourselves and the world. But that doesn't mean forcing yourself to step away from screens for periods of time isn't a good idea.

7. Limiting use of social media has benefits

And, finally, Reason #7 is that putting down the phone and stepping away from social media has been shown to have positive effects (which you probably already figured).

One study, [for example](#), found that limiting use of social media among university students to a maximum of 30 minutes a day over three weeks was associated with reductions in feelings of loneliness and depression.

"After a week of baseline monitoring, 143 [university students] were randomly assigned to either limit Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat use to 10 minutes, per platform, per day, or to use social media as usual for three weeks...The limited use group showed significant reductions in loneliness and depression over three weeks compared to the control group. Both groups showed significant decreases in anxiety and fear of missing out over baseline, suggesting a benefit of increased self-monitoring."

It's also been suggested by people in the wellness industry that human beings benefit greatly from the sort of community and interactions that aren't as easily accessible when we're staring at screens. This is why spa and wellness businesses might consider creating digital detox experiences, if you don't already. It doesn't have to be all digital detox all the time. A day out of the week or month, or an hour out of the weekend, well promoted with special packages or treatments and services might be just what your customer base wants and needs.

Spas and wellness retreats offering the option of a digital detox include:

Miraval Berkshires, where mindfulness is the core of the Miraval philosophy and guests are asked to use technology only in designated locations "to practice being mindful of the moment and respectful of fellow guests."

Zulal Wellness Resort By Chiva-Som, which, according to its website is the first resort in Qatar to incorporate the pioneering digital detoxing concept. At Zulal, "the use of mobile phones and digital equipment is restricted in an effort to inspire families and individuals to reconnect with themselves and with surrounding nature."

Rancho La Puerta, where cell phone use is prohibited in public areas, "primarily because the Ranch is a retreat that values real conversation and connections."

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