

How to enjoy a digital detox over Christmas

December 10 2021, by Brad McKenna, Wenjie Cai



Credit: Nataliya Vaitkevich from Pexels

It is not surprising that many of us have been [suffering from digital overload](#) during the pandemic, and taking care of our "digital wellbeing" has become a common theme. Social media, online shopping, making reservations, and even necessary chores like paying bills have meant that technology has pervaded every aspect of our lives.

Whether home schooling or working from home, our mobile phones have never been far from our side. We've even embraced video communication technology for keeping in touch with friends and loved ones, whether they live locally or thousands of miles away.

To be frank, it can be very hard to imagine how we can just decide to cut it off. And the constant pressure to always be available—and reply immediately—can be overwhelming.

But with Christmas coming, you may be planning to take a break from work and perhaps even go on holiday. So, why not take the opportunity to have a [break from technology](#) and try a digital detox?

In our new work we investigated [different ways to reduce tech use](#) on holiday. Here's what we discovered.

1. Lock it away

By far the most efficient way to get the most out of the experience is to lock your phone, laptop and tablets away. Of course, you have the option to turn on "do not disturb" mode, or selectively turn off notifications on some apps. However, it is quite a task to turn off notifications for certain groups of apps, and with your phone still in your pocket there's always an excuse to check Facebook or Instagram, to reply to an email, or upload a photo. This approach means you could still scroll through your phone, and muscle memory means you can open apps without even realizing it.

You could consider limiting your phone usage time. For example, one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. But our study found that soon you would spend much longer without realizing it and find more excuses to be online.

So, the best solution is to go cold turkey and lock your phone in a box or hide it somewhere. This removes the challenges of turning off notifications or limiting your [phone](#) time.

At first it might be a bit overwhelming. But after a while you will start to feel the benefits, and will hopefully feel more liberated, freer, or [like a weight has been lifted](#). You may even find that you want to stay disconnected for longer.

2. Don't forget to plan

It's very difficult not to unwind in the countryside. There, you don't need to worry about navigating city streets and the overwhelming digitalised infrastructure of cities (such as apps for booking restaurants, cinema tickets and public transport). So if you can get away, it will make the detox feel much more natural.

But prior planning is essential. Turn on your out-of-office message, let your colleagues, clients and boss know that you are away. Inform your loved ones and friends so you won't be stressed about [them trying to reach you](#).

You should also print booking confirmations and train, plane and other travel tickets—and get a paper map so you can leave your digital devices behind. If you find the preparation too much of a fuss, you can book your experience with a digital detox holiday provider who will help with the planning and adjustment to a week or two without sensory overload.

3. Find the positives

As technology is considered the "default" in our lives, you might experience some difficulties disconnecting cold turkey from a world

where we are connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At first, disconnecting might throw up some considerable [emotional challenges](#)—such as feeling stressed, anxious or frustrated.

We suggest trying to re-frame the struggles in your mind as positive by looking at the experiences as rewards rather than punishments. For example, not being able to use digital apps or websites to navigate around and find highly-rated restaurants can be frustrating—but it can also create a sense of excitement from having the opportunity to explore the unknown, experience unexpected encounters, or master new skills in using paper maps and perhaps even a compass.

You might find hidden gems or more opportunities to talk to locals.

Yes, you won't be able to share your experience instantly on [social media](#), but you will have more quality time with your companions rather than checking likes and replying to comments on your posts.

The digital detox experience opens up opportunities to reconnect with long forgotten nostalgic childhood memories, and the old times you probably haven't thought about for a long time. Sometimes humming an old tune or simply playing some childhood games can be enough to take you back.

4. Reflection

The most important tip is to reflect on the digital detox experience. Everyone has their own unique relationship with technology, and you would benefit greatly from finding the best way to achieve a healthier relationship with it. Try to use the experience as an opportunity to reflect on how the digital detox makes you feel, and what would you like to do after returning to the busy connected world to help prevent digital

overload from setting in again.

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