



# Digital detoxing

a workbook and guide

## An introduction



There's no disputing that we benefit greatly from technology on a daily basis, but being more connected up than ever before has replaced some of our basic human connections and research suggests that our mental health is suffering as a result.

While we have information at the touch of a button and the tools to make our lives easier in many ways, many of us have lost control of our social interactions and wellbeing in our 'real' lives. This guide is designed to help you notice, prevent and take action against digital overuse, protecting yourself and your loved ones from its negative impacts and helping you live a happier and healthier life in the digital era.

# What is a 'digital detox'?

A 'digital detox' (sometimes called 'unplugging') has been described by some as a voluntary and intentional period when you reduce, or completely stop, spending time on your electronic devices. This may be timeout from one device (like a smartphone) or all of them. You might avoid your device/s entirely or just refrain from a specific function (like social media).

## ACTIVITY

Have you ever considered having a digital detox? Write down your initial thoughts about why you are drawn to using this workbook...

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## Did you know...?

- 53% of people wake up at night to check their phone (*Digital Detox, 2023*)
- Over a third of people have felt the need to take a digital detox (*UKAT, 2025*)
- Brits get an average of 146 notifications on their phone every day (*Brand, 2024*)
- Digital overuse is not only 'a younger generation problem', with over 65s admitting to being hooked (*UKAT, 2025*)

## The story so far

After the introduction of the World Wide Web in the early 90s, researchers (primarily psychologists and anthropologists) soon started to realise there may be some potential downsides to this life-changing technology. Psychology Professor, Dr Kimberley Young, quickly proposed one of the first sets of criteria to determine internet addiction in 1998.

## ACTIVITY

How many of the initial eight criteria for internet addiction are true for you?

- ☐ Preoccupation with the Internet
- ☐ A need for increased time spent online to achieve the same amount of satisfaction
- ☐ Repeated efforts to reduce Internet use
- ☐ Irritability, depression, or mood instability when Internet use is limited
- ☐ Staying online longer than anticipated
- ☐ Putting a job or relationship in jeopardy to use the Internet
- ☐ Lying to others about how much time is spent online
- ☐ Using the Internet as a means of regulating mood.

Dr Young said that any individual who fulfilled five of the eight criteria would be regarded as 'Internet addicted'.

With the launch of sites like LinkedIn, YouTube and MySpace in the early 00s, researchers shifted their concern to social media. In 2007, Apple launched the first iPhone and the reign of the smartphone began. We could now carry the internet with us everywhere we went in our pockets.

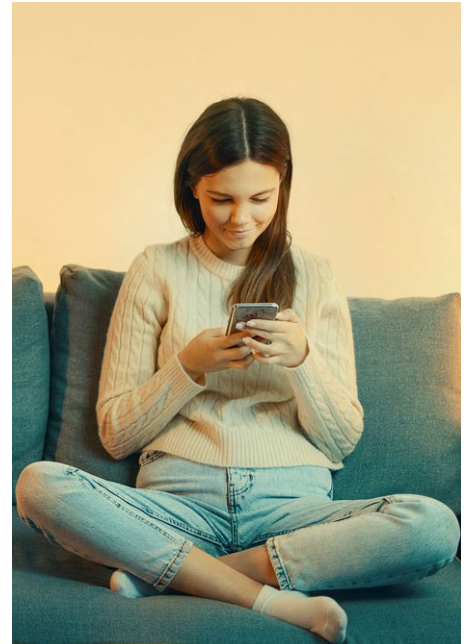
Public awareness of the dangers of digital overuse started to spread, and by 2012, 60% of Facebook users had made a conscious effort to voluntarily take a break from Facebook for a several weeks or more. It wasn't long before no-screen retreats and awareness-raising campaigns like Time To Log Off were popping up all over the globe, asking people to take a hard look at how much screen-time they were getting.

In 2013, the term 'digital detox' was defined by the Oxford Dictionary as:

**digital detox (n):** a period of time during which a person refrains from using electronic devices such as smartphones or computers, regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world: break free of your devices and go on a digital detox.

Flashforward to today, people are increasingly concerned about their smartphone use. But it isn't as simple as forgoing our smartphones altogether. The use of digital devices is an integral part of modern life, making it unrealistic (and even damaging in some cases) to live without them. An Oxford University study showed that healthy digital use is all about the 'Goldilocks effect' – finding what's "just right" for you.

What matters is balance – recognising when enough is enough and having the tools to stay in control. This guide is designed to help you notice, prevent, and take action against digital overuse, protecting yourself and your loved ones from its negative impacts and helping you live a happier and healthier life in the digital era.



# The issues with digital overuse

Digital overuse impacts our emotional, physical, social and professional lives - and smartphones aren't the only culprits! Extensive research has found smartphone, computer, gaming and other digital overuse to be related to...

## Emotional issues

- Higher depression and anxiety rates
- Increased stress
- Imbalance of brain chemicals like dopamine (the reward chemical) and serotonin (the mood controller)

## Physical issues

- Physical issues
- Sleep difficulties
- Musculoskeletal problems
- Cardiorespiratory problems
- Eye damage and vision loss

## Social issues

- Reduced quality of social interactions
- Isolation and loneliness
- Cyberbullying and 'trolling'
- Abuse and exploitation
- Poorer parenting

## Professional issues

- Lower productivity
- Poorer academic results
- Attentional difficulties

### Did you know...?

There are several sub-types of internet addiction, including online gambling addiction, shopping addiction, and cybersex (Radtke et al, 2021). Gaming disorder was even included in the latest revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (WHO, 2018).

## Some warning signs...

It can be difficult to realise that these issues are developing, especially considering all the benefits we get from our devices. Here are some warning signs that might indicate the cons are starting to outweigh the pros:

**Time:** You need to spend increasing amounts of time online to achieve satisfaction, or you consistently lose track of time when you're on your phone, tablet, gaming system or computer (for example, 'doomscrolling'). You might feel yourself unable to stop, even when you notice time passing.

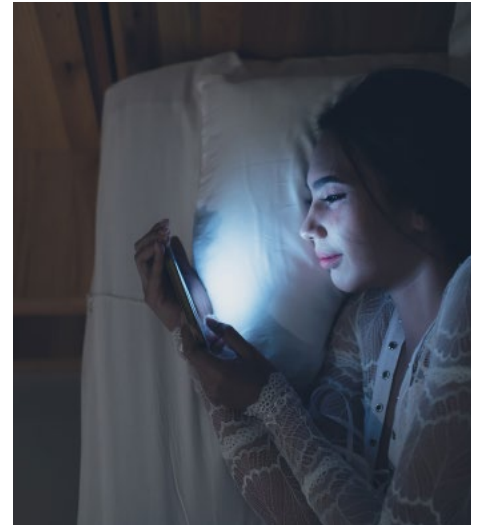
**Withdrawal:** You constantly think about your devices, or you feel restless, irritable or moody without them. Accidentally leaving your phone, or not being able to use your device because you're supposed to be doing something else, might feel incredibly distressing or frustrating.

**Escape:** You use the internet to avoid thinking about problems or feeling difficult emotions (but perhaps this is working less and less).

**Risky behaviours:** You might notice yourself lying to others about how, or how much, you use your devices or the internet. People might make comments on your digital use or even start distancing themselves from you. You might be falling behind at work or struggling to keep up with study.

**Physical symptoms:** Your body feels tired: your eyes feel strained or dry, you get frequent headaches, or your back, shoulders or hands ache. You might struggle to get to sleep at night or wake up during the night (and, without thinking, reach out to check your phone).

If you notice even one of the above symptoms, consider it a warning that a problem might be starting. If you have multiple symptoms, you might want to consider a digital detox (keep reading!) or getting professional support (see *Getting Support* on page 24).



For advice specifically around social media, including identifying the benefits and pitfalls and tips for healthy social media use, see our [Healthy Social Media Booklet](#).

# What might be leading you to digital overuse?

Identifying why you are over-using your devices can help you decide how to go about detoxing from them.

Over the next two sections we will go into the two overarching reasons for digital overuse – brain hacking by design and the personal search for meaning.

## Brain hacking by design

The first, and probably simplest reason leading us to digital overuse, is that our devices are designed, inside and out, to make us want to use them and prevent us from stopping using them. How do they do this? They hijack a number of our brain's systems, like our systems for reward and attention.

### **Reward system**

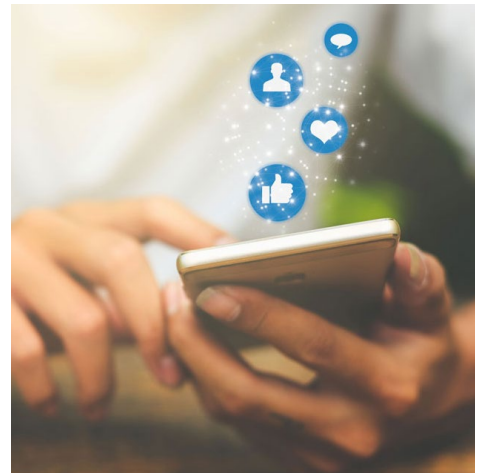
Our devices and the apps on them are designed to be enjoyable. Any enjoyable activity, from watching Netflix to scrolling on Instagram, switches on the brain's reward system, flooding the brain with the feel-good chemical messenger dopamine and making us want to come back for more. Dopamine is behind all our habits (and addictions) making it a major driver of our actions.

But dopamine doesn't judge. If something is rewarding, dopamine is onboard. Whether it's good for us or not, whether we actually want to do it or not, if something triggers the release of dopamine, we're going to feel motivated to repeat the behaviour.

And it's not just the 'reward' itself that gets dopamine going – it's the suspense, the 'what if', the anticipation of a reward. Uncertainty and sensory changes create dopamine spikes that can even outshine the satisfaction of the reward itself. This makes things like 'pull down to refresh' functions and next-episode countdowns incredibly effective dopamine-hackers.

### **Attention system**

While our reward system keeps us coming back, our brain's attention system decides what gets our focus in the first place. Our devices are expertly designed to take advantage of this, from getting our attention to preventing us from taking it away.



Our brain's various attention systems prioritise different types of information based on a combination of biological, cognitive and emotional factors:

- **Things that are new** - our brains are wired to notice new and unexpected things to keep us safe by spotting potential threats and opportunities. The constant slew of new information that our devices provide us keep us hooked.
- **Things that are familiar** – on the flip side, we are also drawn to patterns and familiar things. For our brains, familiar = safe. Repetitive structures and tailored algorithms lull us into the sense of security that our brains crave.
- **Things that are relevant** – our 'salience' network is on the look out for what's important to give our attention to. Things that are bright, loud, moving or high contrast (like most things on the internet) tend to grab our attention, but also things that are personally meaningful to us (think tailored ads and social media algorithms).
- **Things that are a potential threat** – The brain prioritises threat detection as a survival mechanism. This means that negative, scary or controversial information can be particularly attention-grabbing.
- **Things that connect us to others** – We are social beings with an innate, evolutionary need to belong. This means we are wired to pay attention to what people around us get up to.

Tech companies use these attention triggers to keep us engaged. They intentionally combine new, familiar, personally meaningful, potentially dangerous and socially relevant content to make their platforms irresistible.

### ACTIVITY

Think about the last time you went on your phone or other digital device. How many of these attention-grabbing categories did you see?

- ☐ Something new
- ☐ Something familiar
- ☐ Something relevant to me
- ☐ Something negative, scary or controversial
- ☐ Something about someone important to us

Once our device has our attention, it's very good at keeping it. App engineers use techniques familiar to any casino-goer, like removing cues that remind users to stop. Where casinos lack clocks or windows, social feeds lack endings (cue doomscrolling). As Tristen Harris, former Google design ethicist who co-founded the Center for Humane Technology said, "If I take the bottom out of the glass, you don't know when to stop drinking" (Wood, 2021).

**"If you take the bottom out of the glass, you don't know when to stop drinking."**

*Tristen Harris*



## The personal search for meaning

Apart from the brain hacks purposefully integrated into our devices, there may be deeper, more personal reasons why we are getting addicted to our devices. While algorithms and dopamine-driven design keep us engaged, our own psychological and emotional needs play a huge role in why we struggle to disconnect.

### Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow was one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century. Influenced by Gestalt psychology, anthropology and humanist psychology (see below), Maslow famously developed a hierarchy (or pyramid) of needs to explain human motivation (see *page 10*).

**Gestalt psychology:** 'gestalt' is a German word closely translating to 'whole' or 'pattern'. Gestalt psychologists and therapists believe that the human experience should be explored holistically – that meaning cannot be found from breaking things down into parts but rather through appreciation of the whole.

*(Gestalt Centre, 2025)*

**Anthropology:** the study of humans – past, present, and future. Anthropologists study how people live, interact, and shape their societies through studying biology, archaeology, culture and language.

*(AAA, 2025)*

**Humanist psychology:** a movement in psychology supporting the individuality and growth-potential of human beings. The movement grew in opposition to the two mainstream 20th century trends in psychology, behaviourism (focused on the actions) and psychoanalysis (focused on mental illness and dysfunction).

*(Britannica, n.d.)*

At the top of this hierarchy of needs, the ultimate goal, is self-actualisation – the ongoing process of striving to reach our full potential.

Maslow believed that 'self-actualising people' have a number of key characteristics and experiences, from accepting themselves and others as they are, to having 'peak experiences' filled with awe and wonder.

“Our own psychological and emotional needs play a huge role in why we struggle to disconnect.”

## ACTIVITY

How often do you feel the following?

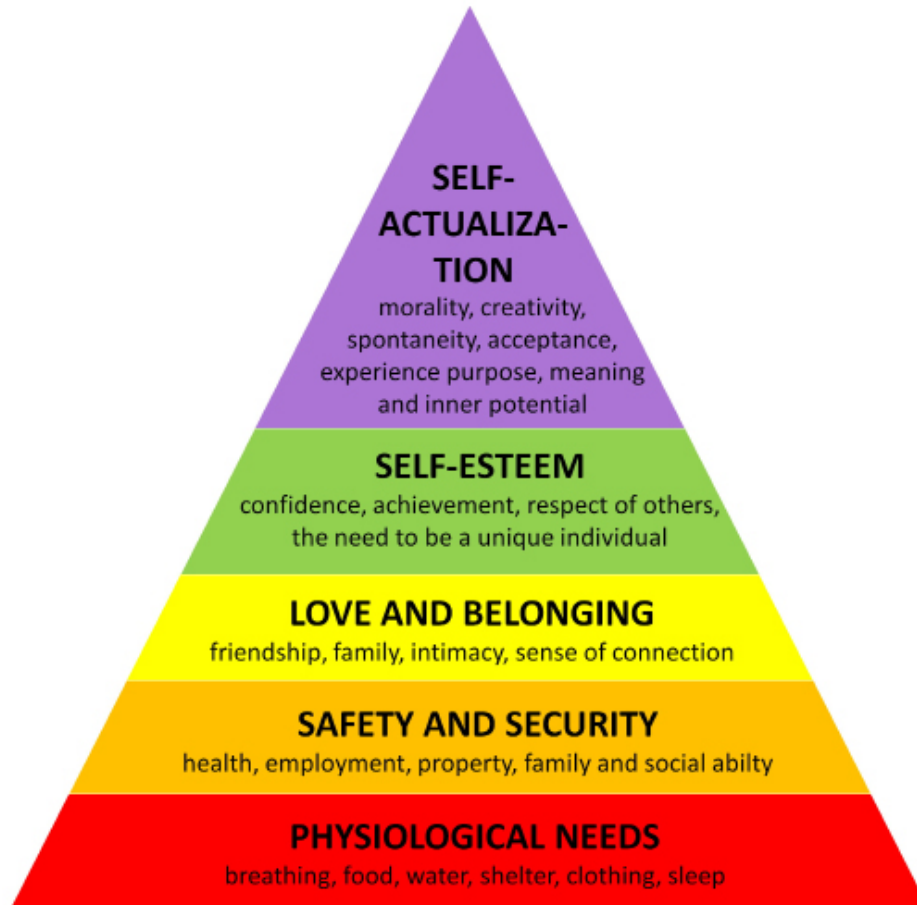
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Frequently
A sense of appreciation for life					
Acceptance of myself and others as they are					
The ability to face problems logically and rationally rather than with fear					
A comfortable independence, not needing to conform to others' ideas of happiness					
A sense of purpose					
Having 'peak experiences' – moments of awe, ecstasy or transformative insight					

Self-actualisers frequently experience all of these things. Sounds good right?

The problem is that self-actualisation sits at the top of a (rather tall) pyramid of needs all of which need to be met first. This makes it a way of being that is the exception, rather than the rule. Most people are working to meet more pressing needs (like the need for safety, love and self-esteem). It isn't until these more basic needs are met that we can move on to self-actualisation.

There are five different levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs which, from lowest to highest, are: physiological needs (keeping us alive), safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and finally self-actualisation.

While this might seem like quite a rigid process, Maslow said that the order in which these needs are fulfilled doesn't always follow this standard progression. For example, for some people self-esteem is more important than the need for love. For others, creative fulfilment (part of self-actualisation) may supersede even basic needs of safety.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)

Importantly, Maslow believed that these needs are like instincts – they motivate our behaviour, often at a subconscious level. Understanding which of our needs are not being met allows us then to better understand (and take control over) our actions.

### Using our devices to meet our needs

Although we might start out using our devices to meet our needs, it's good to check in from time to time to see if they are still helping. It might be that digital use has become more of a habit than a help, and it might even be making things worse.

## ACTIVITY

Consider these five categories of needs, how they feel to be met or unmet, and how digital devices might be helping or hindering...

Needs	How does it feel when these needs are being met?	How does it feel when these needs are not being met?	How are digital devices helpful in meeting these needs?	How are digital devices unhelpful in meeting these needs?	What might be a non-digital alternative to meeting these needs?
Physiological, i.e. food, shelter, sleep					
Safety and security, i.e. health, employment, family					
Love and belonging, i.e. friendship, intimacy					
Self-esteem, i.e. confidence, self-esteem, feeling unique					
Self-actualisation, i.e. a sense of purpose, creative fulfilment, acceptance of self and others					



## Digital detox: a tailored approach

While 15 million people in the UK have already tried to abstain from their digital devices, around 25% said they barely managed to stay off them (UKAT, 2025).

An important finding from behavioural science studies is that how effective a digital detox is significantly differs depending on the person and the detox strategy. This highlights the importance of a personalised approach – there is no one size fits all.

Not sure where to begin with your digital detox? We've taken inspiration from the well-adopted 'seven types of rest' – first described by physician and mental wellness author and speaker Dr Saundra Dalton-Smith in her book *Sacred Rest* – to bring you seven types of digital detox. Take the short quiz on the next page to uncover your biggest digital drain and the type of digital detox you might need most, then head to the relevant page for a guide to your tailored detox day.

### Taking control of your screen time

If you're looking to get control of your screen time, check out these general tips...

1. Set specific time limits for device/app use with Apple's Screen Time or Google's Digital Wellbeing.
2. Create tech-free zones (such as bedrooms or dining tables).
3. Plug your phone in outside your bedroom at night (go old-school with an alarm clock instead).
4. Check your notification settings for each app and disable any that aren't important.
5. Schedule your phone's 'bedtime mode' (Android) or 'sleep focus' (Apple) to come on before you usually go to bed (two hours of screen-free time before sleep is recommended).
6. Set reminders to take a no-screen break during work or study time (every 30 minutes is recommended).
7. Have an alternative to hand – sometimes we just reach for our phone out of boredom and convenience. Get into the habit of having a book, journal, sketchpad or something else engaging to hand or near your phone to give yourself an offline option.

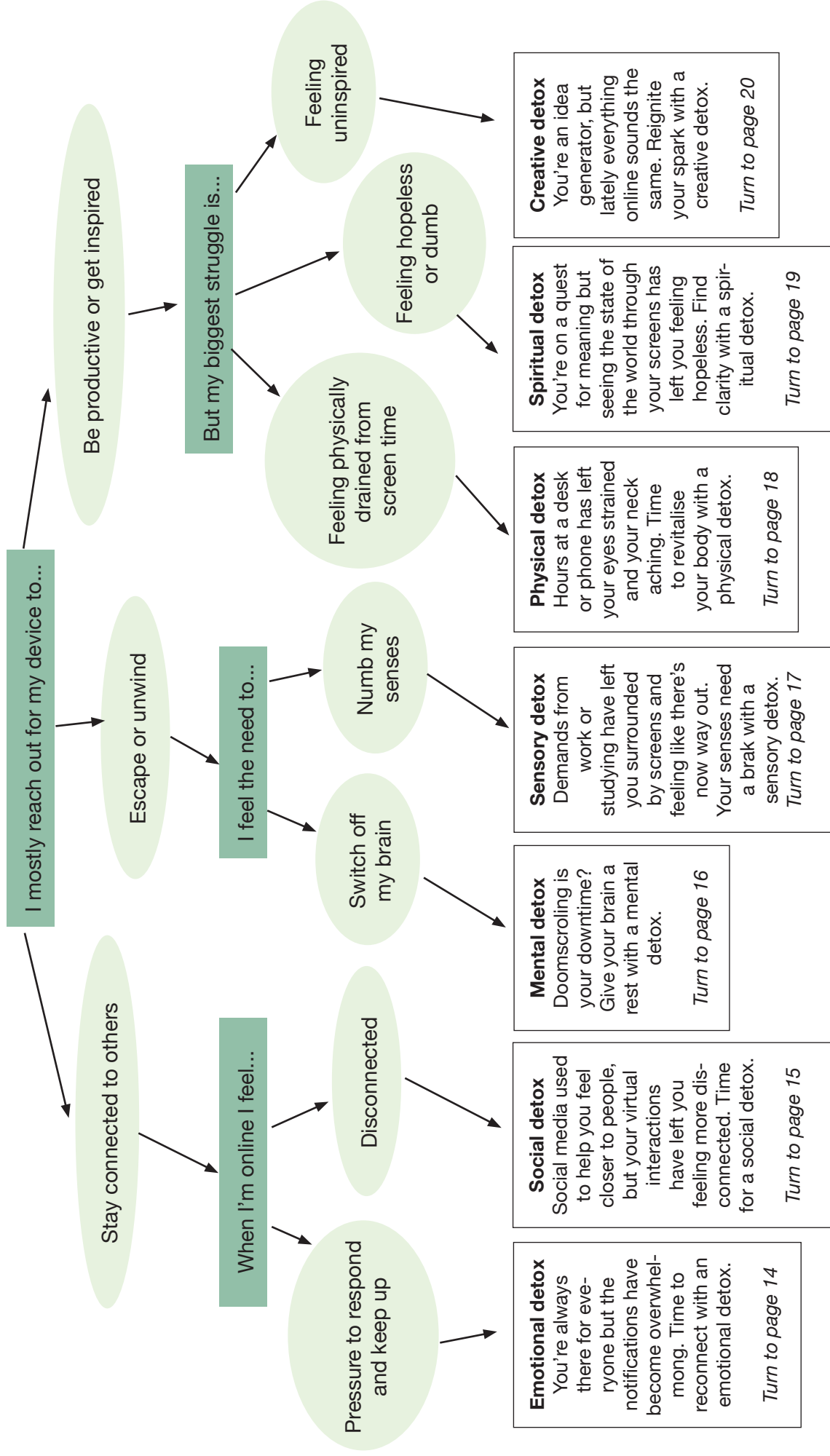


Diagram: Identify your detox needs

## 1. Emotional detox – a self-care day

**Goal:** spend a full day focusing on your emotional wellbeing without digital distractions.

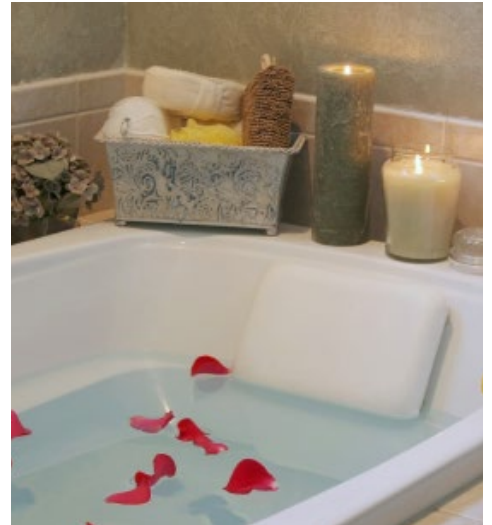
**Begin with gratitude** – write down a list of things you're grateful for.

**Express yourself creatively** – paint, draw, collage, write or move your body as you reflect on your emotions

**Let your emotions flow** – create the space where you can most openly express your emotions. This might be meeting a particular friend for a chat, spending time alone in a luxurious bubble bath, or getting your anger out on a punchbag!

**Nourish yourself** – prepare your favourite meal, focusing on the process and not rushing through it

**End with reflection** – journal or write a letter to yourself about what emotions came up for you today, or about your emotions more generally, and how you can practise more self-care in the future



**Use the space below to draw or write about the emotions that came up for you today.**



## 2. Social detox – a day of in-person connection

**Goal:** spend the day with the people who make you feel most like yourself.

**Start with a plan** – reflect on who you feel most yourself with and arrange a meet up. Try going old-school with communication by arranging plans in advance so you don't need to check your phone on the day.

**Engage deeply** – commit to spending time together with no distractions (including not checking your phone!). Have a meal together, take a walk, host a games night, do something creative together or just talk.

**Practise random acts of kindness** – compliment a stranger, buy someone a coffee or send a postcard to an old friend.

**Write a heartfelt letter** – this could be to yourself or to a loved one, you don't have to send it. Take the time to express your gratitude and love.



**Use this space to write a heartfelt letter to yourself or a loved one, you don't have to send it.**



### 3. Mental detox – a brain reset day

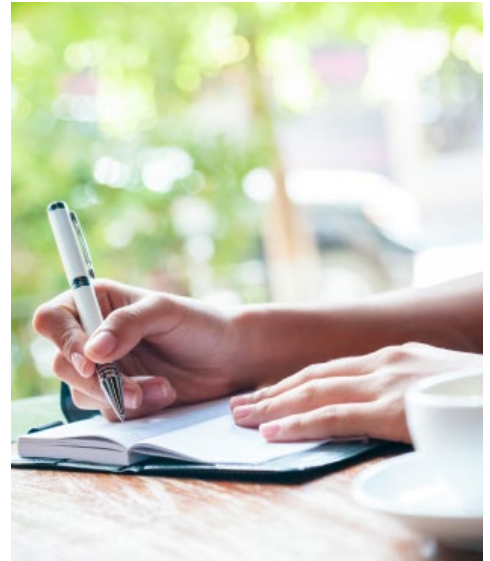
**Goal:** clear your mind by avoiding news, social media, and digital consumption for a full day.

**Start with a ‘mind dump’** – write down all the thoughts buzzing in your head before the day starts.

**Focus on single-task activities** – throughout the day focus on one task at a time without multitasking. This might include decluttering your home – a clear space can create a clear mind.

**Find a ‘flow state’ activity unique to you** – these are intrinsically rewarding activities (i.e. that you enjoy for the sake of doing them, without external reward) that you become immersed in. This might be gardening, reading, rock climbing, painting, crocheting or doing a puzzle (it is recommended to be in flow state for at least 90 minutes once or preferably twice a week).

**Slow down your evening** – try deep breathing, journalling or meditation before bed instead of reaching for your phone



#### Use this space for your brain dump, or try out these journal prompts...

What have I been over-thinking recently? Are these thoughts helpful, enjoyable or will they matter in a week's time? If I let these thoughts go, how would that feel?

How do I usually fill quiet moments? Do I reach for my phone, and if so, why?

What are three things that make me feel mentally refreshed? How can I do more of them?

#### 4. Sensory detox – a day immersed in nature

**Goal:** reset your senses by spending the day in nature with no digital distractions.

**Pick your nature spot** – a park, beach, hiking trail or even a backyard. Leave all devices behind – no music, podcasts or screens. Just soak in the sights, sounds, and textures around you.

**Engage your senses** – notice five things you see, four things you hear, three things you feel, two things you smell and one thing you taste. Why not pack a snack or go foraging if it's safe to do so?

**End with reflection** – sit in a peaceful spot, write in your journal or simply watch the sunset.



**Write down what you see, hear, smell, feel and taste throughout the day.**

## 5. Physical detox – a day of movement and mindfulness

**Goal:** spend the day moving your body and giving it a break from screens.

**Start the morning with gentle movement** – stretch or do some light yoga to start your day.

**Incorporate unplugged movement into your day** – walk or cycle instead of driving, dance while you clean your home, or do some exercise with a friend. Leave behind the screens, be present in your movement.

**End with physical relaxation** – take a warm bath, give yourself a massage or stretch before bed.



**Movement tracker – note down your movements throughout the day and how they made you feel.**

## 6. Spiritual detox – a day connecting with a sense of something bigger

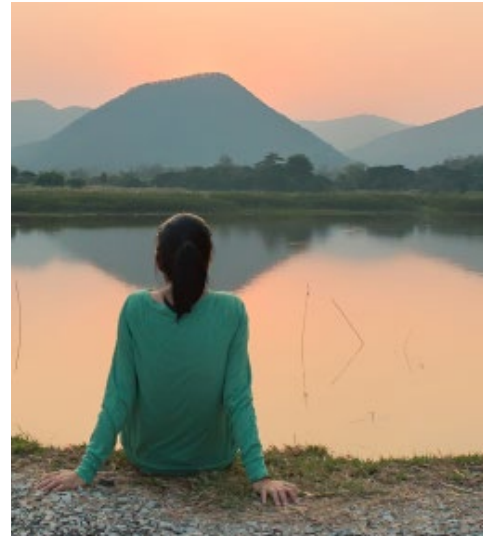
**Goal:** spend the day connecting with appreciation for life and a sense of something bigger than yourself.

**Visit a meaningful place** – somewhere that is personally meaningful to you that allows you to connect with something beyond yourself. This might be a religious building, a place in nature or a creative space.

**Practise a personal ritual** – see the box below for ideas on creating a personal ritual.

**Engage in deep reflection** – this might mean reading a philosophical, poetic or religious text, or having a meaningful conversation with someone important about the big questions of life.

**End the day mindfully** – write in your journal about what inspires you, try a candle-gazing meditation or connect with your body with some stretching to end the day.



### **Creating a personal ritual - use this space to get ideas and plan your personal ritual**

**Step 1. Set an intention** – this might be to let go of something, to welcome something new into your life or to mark a transition. How do you want to feel at the end of your ritual?

**Step 2. Plan the ritual activity** – choose an activity that metaphorically expresses your intention. It can be helpful to incorporate nature – you might find a stick to symbolise your worries and send it down a river or find a natural object to symbolise your hopes and planting it.

**Step 3. Creative a simple structure** – try a three-step format: opening (taking a deep breath, lighting a candle, setting an intention), main practice (the ritual activity you planned), and closing (taking a deep breath, blowing out the candle or expressing gratitude).

**Step 4. Reflect** – use the space below to reflect on your ritual. You might write about how you felt before, during and after, or draw an image.

## 7. Creative detox – a day of creating without judgment

**Goal:** get re-inspired and find your spark again by spending the day creating, judgment-free.

**Wake up your imagination** – start the day with ten minutes of free writing, drawing or playing an instrument – no judgment, no stopping.

**Get inspired in the real world** – visit a creative space in your area, a gallery, an area of town with lots of street art, a library, or a spot in nature. Look for tiny details in what you see, or engage in imaginative reflection by asking yourself questions like “if this painting/book/tree was trying to tell me something, what would it be saying?”

**Create a personal collage** – cut out words and images that stand out to you (you can use old magazines or get cheap picture books from charity shops). Try not to think about what you’re creating, just go with the flow.

**Create a tech-free creative zone and get making** – what lights up your creativity? It might be trying a new medium, using found objects in nature, creating a new recipe or even doing a scientific experiment – there is no right or wrong way to create. If you’re stuck, try the story making exercise below.

**When in doubt, create more restrictions** – sometimes too much freedom can feel paralysing rather than inspiring. Introducing restrictions can spark creativity by giving your mind parameters to work within. You could limit yourself by colour, style, shape, size, letter, subject or time. For example, using only what you have lying around (like cardboard or objects) to create a self-portrait.



### Not sure where to start with your creative detox? Try this story-making activity.

Write or draw your immediate responses to the following prompts:

- The main character – this could be a person, animal, object, or absolutely anything else! You might also think about where they are or what they’re feeling.

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- What does this character want?

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- What is stopping the character from getting what they want?

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- Who, or what, comes to help?

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- What happens when the character faces what is stopping them, with the help that has arrived?

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- What happens next?

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Bonus reflection: who or where are you in the story? How does the story reflect your own journey?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Reflecting on your digital use

- What have you learned about your digital use?

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- How would you like to approach digital use going forward?

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- What are some of your personal warning signs that mean you might need a digital detox?

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## Getting support

The information and techniques in this workbook should help you navigate balanced digital use and give you ideas for when you need to take a screen-free break. Remember, these techniques are not one-size-fits-all. It's important to find the right strategy for you that is based on your personal needs.

Our friends and loved ones can be great systems of support in our journey to find digital balance. Let them know your goals and boundaries (distraction-free social interactions or screen-free zones) so they can support you. You might also encourage them to be more mindful of their own screen-time (see *Supporting those around you on page 26 for more information*).

Sometimes we need more support than our loved ones can provide. Don't be afraid to seek professional help when:

- you've tried changing your habits and improving your digital use, but you still feel out of control with any aspect of your digital use.
- you feel uncomfortable talking to friends or loved ones, or feel ashamed or isolated due to your digital use.
- you're still feeling stressed, low or overwhelmed, despite using your digital devices less.
- your digital use continues to impact your relationships, work or study.

### How counselling and psychotherapy can help with digital overuse-related problems

Different types of counselling and psychotherapy can be incredibly effective in addressing issues related to digital overuse. Since digital overuse often manifests in forms such as anxiety, depression, social isolation, and compulsive behaviour, different therapeutic approaches provide tailored tools to address these concerns. Here's how various types of counselling and psychotherapy might help with problems stemming from digital overuse:

**Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** CBT is one of the most widely used therapies for tackling compulsive behaviours and problematic thought patterns. In the context of digital overuse, CBT can help by identifying and challenging negative thought patterns and building healthier habits.

**Psychotherapy:** Psychotherapy delves into unconscious processes and past experiences that shape current behaviours. For digital overuse, this approach may involve exploring emotional needs, understanding attachment patterns or gaining insight into why digital overuse may be an avoidance strategy for deeper emotional issues and how to better address these.



**Creative Arts Therapies:** This includes Dramatherapy, Art Therapy and Music Therapy Dance Movement Therapy and forms of psychotherapy that bring about psychological wellbeing through engagement with the arts. For digital overuse, a creative approach to therapy could help you externalise and process feelings, address painful unmet needs with more distance and find new, creative perspectives and solutions.

**Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT):** ACT helps individuals accept their emotions and thoughts without judgment, rather than avoiding or suppressing them. With digital overuse, ACT may be useful for accepting (while resisting) cravings, building mindfulness and aligning values with actions

**DBT Based Therapy:** DBT based therapy combines mindfulness with behavioural change techniques and is particularly helpful for people struggling with emotional dysregulation and impulsive behaviours—issues that often underpin excessive screen time. This approach can help with emotional regulation, distress tolerance skills and navigating relationships.

**Counselling psychology:** Counselling psychology focuses on improving emotional wellbeing, coping with life stressors, and addressing developmental and relational concerns – all of which might be related to digital overuse. This might be done by identifying emotional triggers, building healthy coping strategies and enhancing emotional intelligence.



There are many more different types of counselling, psychology and psychotherapy, all of which might be beneficial in tackling the problems causing, or caused by, digital overuse. The most important factor is finding the professional, or modality, which feels most right for you.

Our highly qualified and experienced team at First Psychology offers a variety of therapy services and works with people with a wide range of issues and problems.

We provide:

- Therapy and coaching services for individuals, couples, children, young people and families.
- Employee counselling, CBT & psychological therapies; wellbeing and personal performance coaching for employers; webinars, workshops, employee events and consultation.

All First Psychology practitioners have excellent qualifications and experience, so you can come to us knowing that you will see an experienced professional.

# Supporting those around you

Perhaps you've noticed someone around you becoming more and more reliant on their digital devices. You may have seen the signs: prolonged screen time, noticeable stress from notifications, or a sense of withdrawal from in-person interactions. While it can be difficult to address digital overuse, especially if the person is unaware or resistant to it, there are several ways you can help support them with empathy and understanding.

Here are some suggestions on how to provide support:

## 1. Open a compassionate dialogue

Sometimes, simply having an open conversation is the first step towards understanding why someone is overusing their digital devices. Rather than directly confronting them about their behaviour, start by expressing concern from a place of care.

- **Use "I" statements:** Focus on how you've noticed their habits changing and how it makes you feel. For example, "I've noticed you seem distracted lately, and I miss spending time with you. Is everything okay?"
- **Be Patient and Non-Judgmental:** Recognise that the person may not be aware of how their digital use is affecting them or others. Be understanding if they react defensively or dismissively at first.

## 2. Offer understanding, not solutions

Sometimes people simply need someone to listen. Empathise with their experience and avoid jumping to conclusions or immediately offering solutions. Many people use digital devices to fill emotional needs, like escaping stress or finding social connection. By listening to their feelings and acknowledging their struggles, you create a safe space for them to open up.

- **Validate their emotions:** Instead of suggesting fixes, validate their feelings by saying things like, "I can see why you might feel overwhelmed with everything happening online."
- **Share your own experiences:** If you've also struggled with digital overuse, tell them about it. This can help them feel understood and less alone in their experience.

## 3. Encourage small, achievable changes

Digital habits can be deeply ingrained, so suggesting drastic changes right away might be overwhelming. Instead, encourage small steps to create healthier habits.

- **Set boundaries together:** If they express a desire to cut back on screen time, offer to set joint goals, such as no devices during meals, or a specific time limit on phone use in the evenings. Doing this together can be motivating.



- **Suggest device-free time:** You might invite them to spend time together in a way that doesn't involve technology, such as going for a walk, cooking a meal together, or playing a game. The goal isn't to "force" them away from screens, but to remind them that there are fulfilling alternatives.

## 4. Celebrate progress and provide ongoing support

Digital overuse is often a deeply ingrained behaviour that can take time to change. Be sure to acknowledge their efforts, remind them of how far they've come, and encourage them to keep going. Supporting someone through their journey of managing digital overuse can be challenging, but with compassion, patience, and practical strategies, you can make a meaningful difference. Start by offering a listening ear, suggest gradual changes, and always lead with empathy. Remember, the goal isn't to 'fix' them or stop them from using their devices all together, but to support them in finding the relationship with technology that they want.

## Final thoughts

Our devices are undeniably powerful tools that have transformed how we live, work, and interact. From staying connected with loved ones across the globe to offering countless opportunities for learning, creativity, and personal growth, the digital world has opened up a wealth of possibilities. However, just as with any tool, its impact on our lives depends on how we use it.

As we've explored in this booklet, digital overuse can subtly creep into our daily routines, affecting our emotional wellbeing, social connections, physical health, and even our professional lives. The key is mindfulness: keeping a close eye on why we turn to our devices, what needs we're seeking to fulfil, and how much of our time is being spent in meaningful, purposeful ways.

By regularly pausing to reflect on our digital habits and experimenting with screen-free alternatives, we can ensure that our digital lives remain an enriching part of our existence rather than a source of stress or disconnection. A digital detox isn't about rejecting technology, but about finding harmony between the digital and the physical worlds.

Ultimately, balance is the goal — using technology to enhance our lives, not dominate them. The more intentional we are in our digital choices, the more we can enjoy the benefits without sacrificing our emotional health, relationships, and sense of self.

**Remember: It's not about perfection. It's about progress. Embrace the process of finding balance and allow yourself the space to recalibrate as you move forward.**

[References for this booklet available here](#)

### More free resources

If you would like to read more about topics connected to the ones explored in this workbook, check out our other booklets:

[\*Healthy social media use – getting the most out of social media for your psychological wellbeing\*](#)

[\*Sleep better, feel better – the connection between sleep and mental health\*](#)

[\*Ecotherapy & Mental Wellbeing\*](#)  
[\*Healthy relationships – surviving the ups and downs\*](#)

[\*The stress factor – your guide to stress\*](#)

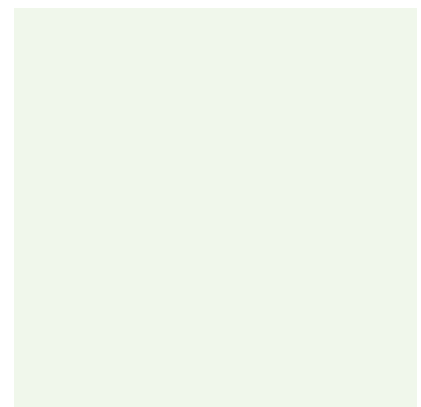
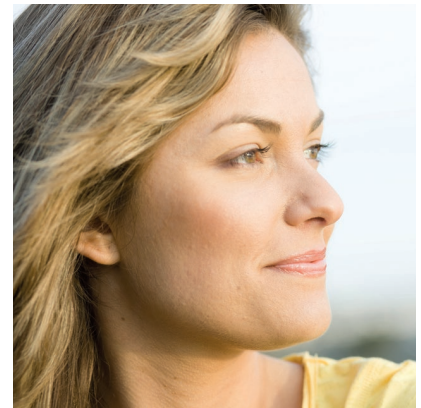
[\*When habits become out of control – a guide to managing unhelpful habits\*](#)

[\*Your guide to mindfulness\*](#)

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Tel: 03330 344115  
Email: [info@firstpsychology.co.uk](mailto:info@firstpsychology.co.uk)  
Web: [www.firstpsychology.co.uk](http://www.firstpsychology.co.uk)

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