Need a Break From Your Smartphone? These Items Might Be Able To Help

Digital devices such as smartphones and tablets are so convenient that it is easy to find oneself constantly reaching for them without even realizing. But a variety of tools, apps and other methods are also available to help people who intentionally want a break from their screens for a digital detox.

“I want to study efficiently without reaching for my smartphone,” said a 25-year-old freelancer who is studying hard for a certification exam.

To resist the temptation to check her smartphone, she puts the device in a plastic, lockable storage case and locks it while she studies.

“I keep the key in a drawer or somewhere else. This lets me focus on the task at hand,” she said.

The woman, who lives in Tokyo, has experimented with various study methods since her student days and shares her insights on Instagram. She introduced the container as a “tip for stopping aimless smartphone use.”

Osaka-based educational supplies manufacturer Sonic developed the container as a tool to aid digital detox. Prices start at ¥1,980.

“Whipping out a smartphone and then wasting time glued to the screen has become a problem for people of all ages, from children to adults,” Sonic’s planning and development department head said. “We hope our product helps them to step away from their smartphones.”

Problem across generations

Addiction to smartphones and digital devices is an issue common to all generations.

An Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry survey conducted last year on men and women aged 13 to 79 found that they spent an average of 2 hours 21 minutes surfing the internet on a smartphone on days off. However, the younger the demographic, the longer they spent on these devices. Teenagers spent 4 hours 26 minutes on their phones, and people in their 20s did so for 4 hours 18 minutes.

In a 2024 survey conducted by Persol Career Co.’s Job Soken, 450 of 606 people aged between 20 and 59 nationwide were aware that they were addicted to their smartphone. Of those, 75% said their addiction affected their daily life through problems such as lack of sleep, poor sleep quality, vision impairment and eye strain.

Apps designed to help users resist the siren call of their smartphone have appeared on the market. Offly, released by Japan Tobacco Inc. in 2024, shows a user’s daily screen time in graph form and sets usage goals. Offly features a function that displays a screen designed to dissuade the user when they try to open a pre-set app.

“We hope users establish a healthy balance with their smartphones and enjoy quality time,” a Japan Tobacco’s development manager said.

Hoshino Resorts Inc.'s Hoshinoya hotel chain offers digital-free stays, in which guests leave digital devices at the front desk when they check in.

Hoshinoya Tokyo, a Japanese-style inn located in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward, offers a service in which overnight guests hand in smartphones and other devices for their entire stay, allowing time for undistracted self-reflection through such activities as swordsmanship practice, meditation and bathing in natural hot springs.

General incorporated association Digital Detox Japan advocates for a lifestyle that maintains a healthy distance from digital devices. It holds occasional events, such as book clubs and camping trips.

Director Shodai Morishita recommends creating physical distance from digital devices and using them with a specific purpose in mind.

"It's important to have hobbies that fully engross you, such as knitting or playing a musical instrument," Morishita said. "Taking a break from your smartphone to 'rest your brain' should increase your daily happiness and productivity."

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