

Our Brains Rewired: The Effects of our Phones on Our Body

Technology is hard to outrun. Nowadays, it's everywhere you look. It's flying in the skies, accompanying you during your drives, and keeping your home safe and functioning. But it's also attached to our hip, our back pocket, or in our hand through our mobile devices.

While the innovation and connectedness we all experience through our phones has numerous positive benefits, there are negative sides to all of the power with a smart device.

"While most people have phones nowadays, they don't realize the impact it can have on your neurons and the wiring of your brain," SouthCoast Health's Neurologist Dr. Victor Rosenfeld stated. "While there is nothing wrong with using your phone to stay connected with family and friends, a sign that the attachment is unhealthy is when you can't bear to be without your phone for small increments of time. The pings you're your phone gives you from messages, posts and alerts create a pleasure or reward response in the brain which uses the chemical dopamine. Dopamine is a very powerful chemical that lead to addiction, and is the same chemical that is released by powerful addicting drugs like cocaine. "

While having a negative relationship with your phone can affect several elements of your health, today we are focusing on how your mobile device changes your brain.

A Phone's Effects on the Brain

Ask yourself: how long can you go without checking your phone? If you could spend an entire work day without even a glance, you have a healthier relationship with your device. If it's a smaller amount, like thirty minutes or less, that's a good indication you might have a serious problem.

Nomophobia, the fear of not having your mobile phone, strikes 46 percent of Americans, according to research presented at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America. Teenagers in particular seem to have very affected, there is a widespread depression epidemic in this age group, greater than has ever been reported in history, and it is linked to excessive smart phone use. Use of a smartphone more than 5 hours a day doubles your risk of depression. Here are just a few of the verified effects that a phone addiction can have on your brain:

- Lessens your ability to concentrate
- Makes you more easily distracted
- Higher chance of having anxiety, depression, impulsivity, and insomnia

- Less desire to interact with other humans, increasing levels of social anxiety
- Risks damaging relationships between friends and family members

How to Realize if There's a Problem

As we mentioned above, a great way to check if you have a smart phone addiction is to ask yourself if you could go a whole day without your phone and not be tempted to reach for it. However, [there is also a test you can take to verify the degree of your addiction](#). Answer the questions, tally up your score, and use the handy chart at the end of the questionnaire to see where you lie on the spectrum.

First Steps in Managing an Addiction

The only way to beat a phone addiction and to stop your device from negatively affecting your brain is to refrain from using it. For those with a phone addiction, this may seem like an impossible feat. To help, we've put together some tangible first steps.

- Turn off your phone during certain times of the day.
 - Here are some examples to shoot for: while at work, when you're spending time with loved ones, and when you're using the restroom.
- Don't bring your phone into your bed. The blue light emitted from phones is harmful for your sleeping patterns.
 - Leave your phone charging on the floor of the bedroom or in another room while you sleep.
 - Make sure not to look at your phone at least 30 minutes before bedtime so you can fall asleep more naturally.
 - Invest in a regular alarm clock to wake yourself up.
- Remove apps that you know you'll be tempted to check, such as Facebook or Instagram. Limit yourself to checking these only when you're on your computer.
- Replace the time you normally spend on your phone with something more mindful and productive.
 - If you have a phone addiction and have impacted your brain in the negative ways discussed above, the only way to reverse those impacts is by rebuilding your neurons through mindful habits.
 - Here are a few mindful habits to choose from: meditation, yoga, journaling, reading a book, a creative hobby such as painting, spending time with loved ones, sitting outside and enjoying the weather, and others.
- Reach for help. Ask your loved ones to keep you accountable, and, if your addiction is strong enough, consider investing in professional help.

If you're worried your phone might have negatively impacted your brain, give us a call at 912-691-3600 to schedule an appointment with Dr. Rosenfeld today.