



#UNPLUG: THE COMPLETE, PRINTABLE GUIDE

STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS TO DITCHING YOUR DEVICES AND NAVIGATING THE WORLD WITHOUT AN INTERNET CONNECTION.

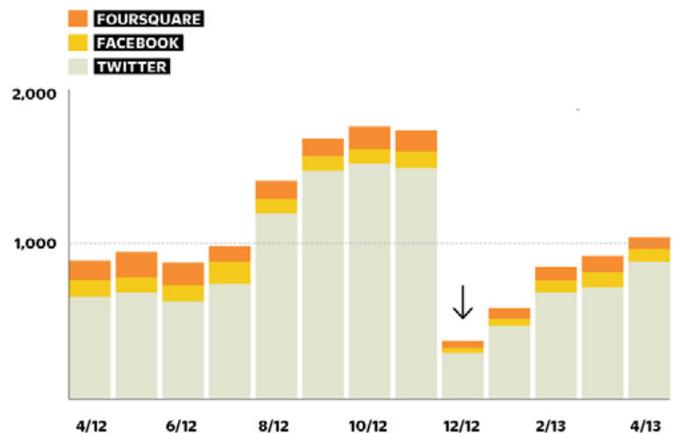
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So, you need to unplug. You're feeling overwhelmed by your gadgets--connected to your email list but not to your personal life. It's time to take a break. It is precisely for times like these that we've created this guide to unplugging. These step by step instructions will walk you through the difficult (but rewarding!) process of unplugging, from deciding when to unplug, to informing your friends and coworkers that you'll be offline for a while, to avoiding the biggest temptations to plug back in. Here you'll find advice from digital detoxing experts, business leaders, and our readers, who we asked to use the #unplug hashtag to submit their best methods for logging off.

We encourage you to print these pages, and when you find yourself reaching for your phone, reach for this guide instead for tips on how to overcome the urge to use your devices. And when you're ready to rejoin the digital world, come to FastCompany.com and we'll help you find the most seamless way to do so. Let the detoxing begin:

LOGGING OFF

During his digital vacation, Baratunde disappeared from social media. Now he's back, but not at the outrageous levels of his pre-detox existence.



Monthly totals of tweets, posts, and check-ins: Baratunde's daily activity dropped to zero for 25 days between December 14 and January 7

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO UNPLUG?

Take a vacation: Comedian, author, and 2011 Shorty Award winner for Foursquare Mayor of the Year Baratunde Thurston recently went offline for 25 days, and lived to tell the tale. "I considered fleeing to a remote island for a few weeks, but I realized I wasn't craving physical escape," Thurston writes. "I didn't actually want to be alone. I just wanted to be mentally free of obligations, most of which asserted themselves in some digital fashion." To do this effectively, he would have to take some time off work. So, he identified a time when his work cycle was at a natural lull: Christmas. "With the exception of Mr. Scrooge, everyone slows down during the holidays, and so would I."

"Travel to a place where absence of wireless reception and wi-fi makes it impossible to connect. Life miraculously continues."

-Elena Sirpolaidis (@elenasirpo)

"Deactivate Facebook during vacation and set a rule to shop locally."

-Blair Knobe @lbknobel

Carson Tate, managing partner of Working Simply, recently shared a bunch of tips with Fast Company: Get over yourself and prioritize some time off; think: "What's the worst that could happen?"

If vacation isn't an option for you, here are a few other times that make for great times to unplug:

Take the weekend: "I think Saturday afternoon is pretty much the best time to unplug ... I find keeping the weekends quiet is critical." -Gina Bianchini, founder & CEO at Mightybell

"When going away for a weekend, don't bring the charger. You'll be forced to conserve battery for only very important emails." - Frank Gu (@ugknarf)

Take the morning: Superlative executives tend to get up super early to work out, read, and otherwise get a jump on the day. If you have an iPhone, extend the do-not-disturb time past your wakeup to add in some quiet.

"Do not bring your cell phone into the bedroom," says Levi Felix, founder of Digital Detox, a company that offers tech-free retreats. "When you bring a cellphone into your bed, you're bringing the whole world with you. You are on call. You're basically a surgeon, available to anyone and everyone."

Take the afternoon: A recent study showed that 2:55 p.m. is the point in the day when productivity levels are at their lowest. Why not take that time to step away from the office and defray your brain? A study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine suggests green spaces lessen "brain fatigue"--the feeling of being distracted, forgetful, and flighty. So go for a walk around the park.

Take the evening: "I attempt to unplug every weeknight around 10:30 (work permitting). I typically go to bed at midnight, so it allows me an hour and half of 'me' time before I go to bed. It's not easy, and there are always distractions. Our brains need to detach themselves from digital devices to be able to have sound sleep at night. Yes, you may miss an email but your long term health will benefit from it." -Brian Kappel, Creative Director at SET, LLC

Take mealttime: “No phones at the dinner table at home. This is time we have to connect with each other. Family time is family time. I try, as much as possible, to put the phone away when we’re doing family activities and be actively engaged with my wife and son when we’re together.” -Gerald Brady, managing director, Silicon Valley Bank

“I CONSIDERED FLEEING TO A REMOTE ISLAND FOR A FEW WEEKS, BUT I REALIZED I WASN’T CRAVING PHYSICAL ESCAPE. I DIDN’T ACTUALLY WANT TO BE ALONE. I JUST WANTED TO BE MENTALLY FREE OF OBLIGATIONS, MOST OF WHICH ASSERTED THEMSELVES IN SOME DIGITAL FASHION.”

“When I’m having a meal with friends or family, it’s an important time for us to share, connect, and have meaningful conversations.” -Oliver Kharraz, COO and founder of ZocDoc

Take a workout break: “I really believe that unplugging through exercise has allowed me to keep the pace required for an exec role in a tech company.” -Catherine Courage, SVP of Customer Experience, Citrix

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“We do encourage our team to take digital down-time,” says Ijad Madisch, CEO of ResearchGate. “We organize a lot of sports events: basketball games, table tennis matches or yoga classes. It’s hard to check your emails in downward dog.”

Take a minute: “These days, it’s next to impossible to avoid the never-ending stream of email, texts and push notifications but it’s so important to me to unplug during personal interactions. Even while sitting in a meeting, at a party or in the middle of a conversation with a friend, I try very hard to avoid it. I don’t let technology take me away from my everyday interactions and experiences ... from life. -Ryan Holmes, CEO of HootSuite

“I never take my iPhone into meetings ... It’s important that I give my undivided attention to my colleagues and partners and I expect (and appreciate!) the same respect in return. ” -Ivanka Trump

However long you plan to unplug, start prepping now. Identify a time that works for you and start making a list of things you’d like to accomplish while you detox.

THE FIVE BIGGEST TEMPTATIONS TO REPLUG

But before you #unplug, it’s best to prepare yourself to deal with the questions typically answered by your device, the web, or an app: How will I get in touch with people if I don’t have my phone? What’s the best way to find a good restaurant without searching Yelp? Where the hell am I?

It’s at these moments that you will be tempted to use. The good news is that there’s a way to prepare for the urge to re-plug by identifying then remembering what, exactly, you want to #unplug from.

For his 25-day detox, comedian, and author Baratunde Thurston didn’t want--or need--to abandon the Internet completely. Not every aspect of digital life was problematic. It’s the web, not, like, crack.

“I love, depend on, and frankly am made a better human being by the convenience of streaming movies, online food ordering, and Google Maps. I did not want to sever ties with friends; in fact, one of my goals was to strengthen relationships with pre-Facebook pals. I wanted to go to lunch, attend holiday parties, and host people for dinner. So I decided I could use my phone for personal calls and texts, and could schedule these encounters with Google Calendar.”

But social media (“including, but not limited to, seeing, reading, downloading, syncing, sending, submitting, posting, pinning, sharing, uploading, updating, commenting, tagging, rating, liking, loving, upvoting, starring, favoriting, bookmarking, plus-oneing, or re-anythinging”) and business activities were prohibited.

To decide what you want to take a break from, first take inventory. “Start by keeping a time log,” suggests Kimberly Young, founder and director at the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery.

“What are the activities you do, and when do you do them? Then once you get that inventory, that in and of itself will probably be enlightening. You can start prioritizing what you can cut out. What is it you really don’t need?”

Then, create a list of things you’d like to accomplish while away, as any mission is best executed when there are goals in mind. “I concocted a wish list of activity for my disconnected time,” says Thurston. “It was a pleasure to contemplate places to visit in New York, books to read, and people with whom I wanted to spend some quality time.”

Once you’ve decided what to give up, and what to do during your #unplug, it’s time to dive in. Here are some of the temptations you should be prepared to deal with, and how to go around them:

1. I’M BORED

Start journaling: “Use a pencil and a pad and write what you’re feeling. Take a moment to be introspective... why is this a problem? What’s really happening? Do you feel a loss of connection?”
-Kimberly Young, founder and director at the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery

Get a hobby (or a pet): “Commit to something outside the office, away from digital responsibilities. I haven’t had a hobby outside of my job for nearly 10 years. So I took a few drastic measures. First, I got a dog. Which I’ve always wanted, but I knew it would force me to get outside, walk and unplug. Second, I joined my co-worker Amy Azzarito in signing up for adventurous classes like Aerial Silks and skateboarding. It’s hard to work your iPhone when you’re dangling from the air.” -Grace Bonney, founder of Design*Sponge

“I have to get up, turn off the laptop and start playing with my cat. Just wander around and engage in some mindless cat-play.” -Alexis Ohanian, co-founder Reddit

“I usually hike, read a book, talk with friends. One day recharges me and feels like a two-week vacation.” -Jonathan D. Becher, chief marketing officer at SAP

“Reading non-fiction books. Even if I’m not captivated by the story, I’m still learning something.”
-Alexis Ohanian, co-founder Reddit

“Develop a habit of doodling instead of tapping or typing. -Dom Sagolla, co-creator of Twitter and chief community officer at Chaotic Moon

Make it impossible to plug in: “I pack up my computer, phone and iPad and charge them in my bedroom so I’m not tempted to use them.” -Grace Bonney, founder of Design*Sponge

“Intentionally seek places without wi-fi reception or even electricity, so you are not tempted to plug

in.” -Yuli Ziv, founder and CEO of Style Coalition

“Have a trusted friend, spouse / partner come up with your mobile device passcode for a weekend. Locked out for a few days.” -@shawanimal, Fast Company reader

2. THE ONLINE WORLD WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE

Turn off automatic sync on your phone: You can live without notifications from ESPN, Boing Boing, and Mafia Wars for a few days--a couple of weeks even!

Have a designated email checker: “To ensure an inbox-free vacation, my chief of staff would log in every few days to check that I didn’t miss anything urgent such as a family emergency, holiday party invite.” -Baratunde Thurston

Delay your emails: “I use Boomerang to delay the sending of emails so I can ensure I won’t get a response at a time that will force me to jump back into work.” -Grace Bonney, founder of Design*Sponge

“I’ve made it a policy not to reply to work emails outside of business hours. People are generally pretty annoyed at first, but they get over it. If it’s an emergency they learn to call, and apparently nothing is an emergency once you have to bother yourself with a phone call.” -Brian Voll, director of product development at Avant Garde Information Solutions

“Support the 24-hour email response rule - for your own mental health and the health of your colleagues, clients and friends. Unless there is an emergency no email has to be replied to immediately.” -Yuli Ziv, founder and CEO of Style Coalition

3. I'M LOST

One of the main things we use our devices for is navigation. It’s easy to leave the house with nothing more than a general sense of where you’re headed, and look up the actual address when you get closer. But without a maps app, what’s a lost traveler to do? You have a few options:

Get a map of your area: You should have one anyway. “I try to print out maps when we’re going places,” says Tiffany Shlain, digital filmmaker and founder of the Webby Awards

“Before you go on this detox, research what’s going on in your neighborhood or city,” says Levi Felix. “Write down the busses or directions of places you need to go.”

Ask for directions: Overcome your fear of speaking to strangers and start asking for directions. Better yet, ask for recommendations on local places to frequent, like restaurants. Thurston did this:

“Since I couldn’t query my online network for local dining and culture options, my massage therapist became my recommendation engine. She told me of several restaurants and sites to check out. She transmitted this data by writing down the names on a piece of paper ... For lunch I frequented Chuko, where the server recommended the pork-belly ramen. This was not the Yelp.com server, mind you, but a human server who proclaimed, ‘Try the pork-belly ramen.’ What an algorithm.”

Give your self a time cushion: If you get lost, you'll have sufficient enough time to ask for help.

4. I HAVE A QUESTION FOR GOOGLE

When you have a question that needs answering, resist the urge to rely on Google by "doing something absurd like digging up a print encyclopedia or rewarding the person who guesses the answer without looking it up (when you confirm later)." -Anna Sternoff, creative strategist

5. I MISS SHARING

When we share our experiences on social media that generate reactions from our connections, our brains release chemicals that make us feel validated. This is the basis of habit--and it's why we are so tempted to share our experiences on Facebook, Instagram, etc. Here's how to ease the withdrawal symptoms during your time away from the digital world:

Share with the people around you: During his time offline, Thurston walked past a whole pig stuffed into a plastic bag on the sidewalk, which he was tempted to share with the world. "Twenty-four hours earlier, I would have Instagrammed this image, along with a suitably witty comment; instead I saved my snapshot for later viewing by people physically close enough to see my phone."

"Instead of Instagram-ing something for everyone else, take a moment to make a 4-inch frame with your fingers and internalize the world through this new lens. Then then draw it or write it. You'll remember that moment more by drawing it writing it or reflecting on it than you will by taking a photo of it." -Levi Felix of Digital Detox, retreats.

"Whenever I get the urge to do something online, I find its counterpart in real life and do it. It's all about the emotion and feeling you get from being 'plugged.' For example, if I felt like I need to post a photo on Instagram, I show it to my colleagues and friends. If I want to share info (personal or general knowledge), I call a friend or share it with colleagues. And so forth. Mainly, I find something around me that would give me a similar feeling and emotion to the one I get from the digital life or interactions." -Alanoud AlMadhi, projects analyst

"The next time you're reaching for your device mid-conversation, ask yourself what you're looking for. Take a moment to assess whether what's on that screen is as important as the connection you're making in person. Undivided attention has become a rare gift, which means it's powerful and appreciated when it's given genuinely." -Jillian Davis, experience planner at creative agency mono

"I need to remind myself if I'm on my phone I might be missing my actual life. Look at the people right around me." Gia Medeiros, marketing and organizational catalyst

"Relax! If a major event happens, someone around you with a mobile device will let you know." -@markcgullett, Fast Company reader.

HOW TO BROADCAST YOUR PLAN TO UNPLUG

When it comes to stepping away from our digital life for an extended amount of time, "the biggest reason people are unsuccessful is because they're afraid people will try to get ahold of them," says Levi Felix of Digital Detox retreats. To ease this fear of missing out (FOMO), "we make sure people

tell anyone who might be trying to get ahold of them in advance.”

For his personal digital unplug, Baratunde Thurston went to great lengths to alert his friends and colleagues he'd be going offline. This was, he discovered, harder than it sounds, particularly when it comes to social media connections.

“As much as we all gripe about email, it is designed to be turned off. Email comes with the vacation-message feature that alerts senders to the fact that we are not available. . . . Social media services, however, are not interested in making absence easy.”

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So, after making a series of loud social media announcements about his upcoming departure from the digital world, Thurston changed his profile photos to read “OFFLINE THROUGH JAN 7, 2013. EXPECT NO REPLIES.” “In an era of high-definition, handheld, multiparty, and free wireless video chat, my best option was essentially a smoke signal,” he writes.



Here are some other tips from Thurston about how to let people know you'll be unreachable:

Schedule your unplug time: “Figure out when you can take a real break. If you want a true digital detox, two weeks is far better than one,” Thurston says. If you can't take two weeks away, try unplugging for the weekend or even once a week. Here are a few other options.

Tell your colleagues: “A month before you leave, make sure that your key coworkers know that you'll be truly unavailable. This gives you time to work out any real problems your absence may create.”

Tell everyone else: “A week before d-day, send an email to a list of those who communicate with you on anything more than an occasional basis, alerting them to your departure. Make it clear to them that this is serious—no one will believe you're really capable of ditching the digital life.”

Warn everyone--AGAIN: “The morning of d-day, send an email to that list again. Make it emphatic: Mine began, ‘I Have Left the Internet.’ If they don't understand that you're for real now, they can't be helped. They have, after all, been warned.”

Set your away message for email: “Your note should be courteous but firm: You will return no

emails (though you may choose to leave emergency contact info)."

Manage social networks: "You can't really turn off Facebook, Google+, Instagram, and so on. So use your home page to establish your absence. Take a photo of a stark message like: I Won't Be Here Until [date of your return]. Use that as your profile photo."

Establish emergency exceptions: "There must be some way for people to reach you. Set up a clear system with someone you trust, who can have access to your email and social media."

Take a deep breath: "Vacate. Completely. It'll be scary for a day or two. And then it will be great."

SOME OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR READERS ON HOW TO ALERT YOUR FRIENDS THAT YOU'RE UNPLUGGING:

"I'm not dead, I'm just tired of tweeting."-@KarlPawlewicz

"My phone's dead. I don't have a charger. I take an accidental afternoon-long hiatus and try to stay mentally present." --@ReginaFlanigan

"By faking your death."-@DavidAndGoliath

"Those who get it will give you your time, and those who don't get it will never notice."-Saurabh Chandrashekhar

Finally, when you're ready to replug, visit Fast Company for advice on how to dive back into your stream without feeling like you're drowning ... and how to make sure you don't get over your head again.