

Can the 1 hour no smartphone rule make you better at your job?

If your phone alarm is what wakes you each morning, then the easiest thing in the world is to slap the alarm off, roll over and start scrolling before you even get out of bed. From quickly checking email and Slack messages to browsing Instagram or getting your morning news fix, if you do this, you're definitely not alone.

Temps de lecture : minute

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A study from the *International Data Corporation* found that 80% of smartphone owners check their devices within the first 15 minutes of waking each morning. And according to Ofcom data, the average person checks their phone every 12 minutes.

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For many people, checking their phone is almost like a compulsion, and science knows why.

It's because when you look at your phone and see a like, response, thumbs up or heart on something you've posted, your brain releases a

small amount of dopamine. And that's what makes us want to look again and again--your brain wants more dopamine, which means you're compelled to look at your phone constantly to scratch the itch.

While many smartphone users are aware of detrimental effects of too much screen time on children and young adults, they may not realise that excessive screen time isn't good for adults either.

A 2023 study found that more than four hours of screen time daily is associated with an increased risk of a number of types of dementia, and has led to the rise of what German neuroscientist and psychiatrist Manfred Spitzer calls "Digital dementia".

While this isn't a diagnosable condition, it can lead to things like issues with your short-term memory or having trouble with multitasking.

And another study found that increased use of screens has the potential to damage learning, memory, and mental health too. In adults aged 18 to 25, the research found that excessive screen time causes thinning of the cerebral cortex. That's not great news, because we use this for processing memory and cognitive functions, like making decisions or solving problems.

Perhaps that's why the "One-Hour Rule" is gaining in popularity. Neuroscience-backed experts at Stanford Lifestyle Medicine recommend it, and advise no screen time for the first hour of the day in order to support cognitive enhancement.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is a long-time fan of the practice. As far back as 2018 he is on record talking about his morning routine. He told the Economic Club of Washington that he spends his mornings reading the newspaper, drinking coffee, and having breakfast with his children.

Bezos calls this "puttering time", defining it on a podcast as 'slowly

moving around'. Lauren Sánchez, Bezos' fiancée, gave some more insight into how this works in a recent interview. "My favourite part of the day is the morning [...] The kids haven't woken up yet. And we don't get on our phones. That's one of the rules," she says, explaining that he "definitely made that rule [...] It wasn't me. But the mornings are just for us as long as we can."

Set a positive tone

While it's true that not everyone has the luxury of a slow start to their morning, *Stanford Lifestyle Medicine* expert Maris Loeffler says that "Intentionally implementing a morning routine that reflects lifestyle medicine choices instead of screen time sets a positive tone for the day and supports brain health and cognitive enhancement."

So, if you want to be sharper at work, this is a tactic to try. Allowing that slow wakeup process gives you--and your brain--the chance to fully experience natural wake-up phases without the disruption that immediate screen time brings.

An early morning screen time reduction can also help you manage stress levels, as you're starting the day out in a calmer way, making you better able to deal with what work has to throw at you.

Additionally, restricting the time you spend on screens and devices first thing can increase your overall efficiency, as well as help you to control those inevitable distractions that'll crop up during your working day.

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