How to Handle Digital Fatigue – Blog

‘Digital Fatigue’ – That might be something you hadn’t heard of until recently, or you may still be completely unaware of why you’re experiencing more headaches, sore eyes, blurred vision, poor posture, extreme tiredness & exhaustion. You’ve guessed it, you’re probably suffering from some form of digital fatigue!

It’s not surprising really and at this point, completely normal. I mean who can say there was a time they had more screen time than during the last 12 months? I certainly can’t.

The pandemic has brought so much with it, other than an awful virus. At times it has brought joy – I’ve got a new found appreciation for the smaller things in life; nature, doing a jigsaw, speaking to loved ones on the phone and reading more. At times it has brought sorrow and anger. One thing it has resulted in almost everyone doing however, is increasing our screen time.

Zoom is a word I’d only previously associated with something moving quickly, but now it is a lifeline, but with it comes ‘zoom fatigue’. It’s hard to understand why spending a day on Zoom or Teams meetings can be more exhausting than attending in person, it takes a lot less physical energy, right? This is true, but it takes a lot more mental energy. In person, you definitely don’t have to show people you’re paying attention by staring intently into their faces about 30cm away from them, on Zoom or Teams that’s really the only way you can show you’re focussed and engaged with what’s being discussed which uses up so much of your energy without you even realising.

It’s great technology can provide the means for our work to continue, meetings to take place and events to take on new, online form but it’s so incredibly important that at a time when morale has been low and tiredness at an all-time high, we invest time in looking after ourselves – when this all eventually comes to an end and life returns to some form of normality, I am sure we’ll all be in need of a ‘digital holiday’ but until that day comes, I am going to give you some tips on how to best handle digital fatigue that I hope you’ll find useful.

1. **Set app limits** – did you know that on most smart phones you can go into your settings and set specific time limits on how long you can access apps for? You might have the intention of checking your social medias after a long day at work for a few minutes, but get sucked into the black hole of Instagram, Facebook & Twitter and not make it out until a couple of hours later. Setting a time limit will tell you to take a break.
2. **Marie Kondo your social media accounts** (if you know, you know) – Unfollow any account that doesn’t bring you joy. If you are determined to fall into the black hole of Instagram after work, at least make sure your pages are full of inspirational posts, ones that make you happy and are of things you’re interested in.
3. **Take regular breaks** – You know in yourself when you’re starting to see double and need 5 minutes away from the screen. That email can wait (most of the time). It’s easy to forget that moving around campus to go to different meetings or buildings is essentially, you taking a break. It’s not healthy to sit at your laptop for the whole day, without any break. Even if you take an extra 1 minute making a cup of tea, it’s needed.
4. **No screens before bed** – We are spending far too much time in front of screens already, put aside an hour or two specifically before bed where you can read, listen to an audio book or podcast or do something you enjoy away from a screen. This is scientifically proven to help you sleep.
5. **On the topic of sleep, sleep**! – Sleep deprivation is a key factor when talking about digital fatigue. A lot of screen time can suppress the hormone melatonin, which directly affects our sleep patterns which can lead to us being less alert and awake the next morning (please refer to tip number 4)
6. **Increase gentle movement** – When you take a short break, try to include some sort of gentle movement. Whether that’s a walk, short yoga class or some stretching it will really help combat the effects digital fatigue can have on your posture and reduce some of those aches and pains.
7. **Be mindful of your screen time** – This probably sounds like the most obvious tip, but really think about when it is necessary for you to meet online rather than have a phone call. It’s become normal to ‘send a Zoom/Teams invite’ when actually, a phone call in some situations is just fine. If you do need to meet online, some meetings might require you to have your camera on and don’t get me wrong, it’s nice to see the faces of real people, but having your camera on all the time is draining. Mostly because it’s normal to be nosey – sometimes sitting in an online meeting you are entering the living room, study, spare room or kitchen of 5+ other households all at once. It’s like when you go for a walk at night and you can see into people’s living rooms, it’s interesting to take in their surroundings but this doesn’t help with eye strain or fatigue caused by intense focus. If you know it’s going to be a really long day of meetings, maybe ask some of the ones that are regular catch ups if everyone can switch their cameras off?

Normally at this point I would list some useful resources you can go and have a look at, but that would be pretty hypocritical asking you to spend more time staring at your screen wouldn’t it? Instead, go for a walk, have a stretch, play with your dog if you have one. Do something away from your screen for 10 minutes and I guarantee you’ll feel a bit better than you did before.

Rebecca Hughes – Mental Health First Aider