

Digital detox: Going cold turkey with no wi-fi in the Lake District

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Place a cross on the lines to show how often you use your phones for these things.

take photos	never _____ every day
listen to audiobooks or podcasts	never _____ every day
stream music	never _____ every day
watch videos	never _____ every day
look up information	never _____ every day
make phone calls	never _____ every day
go on social media	never _____ every day
read the news	never _____ every day
messaging	never _____ every day
find directions or use as a navigation tool	never _____ every day

b. Draw a line from top to bottom that goes through each cross. Compare your lines and answers with other students' and briefly talk about anything else you use your phone for on a daily basis.

2 Key words

a. Write the correct word from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

antidote binge bombarded crave detrimental
 embrace encroach exacerbate off-grid phenomenal
 predilection rambler resistant rudimentary tiresome

1. a feeling that you like something _____
2. making you feel annoyed or bored _____
3. given so much information etc that it is difficult to deal with it all _____

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4. gradually reduce the amount of time that someone has available to do what they want to do _____
5. want very much to have something (that is difficult to obtain) _____
6. make a problem become worse _____
7. do too much of something that you enjoy _____
8. something that helps to improve the effects of something bad or negative _____
9. not connected to the internet _____
10. someone who goes for long walks for enjoyment _____
11. extremely impressive _____
12. completely accept something such as a new belief, idea or way of life _____
13. basic, and not detailed or developed _____
14. harmful or damaging _____
15. opposed to something _____

b. Use the correct form of some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. The water shortages were _____ by the long, dry summer.
2. Walking will help you to sleep and is an effective and cheap _____ to stress, nervous tension and depression.
3. Neil was very _____ to his doctor's advice to give up smoking and cut down on fatty foods.
4. Josephine had always had a _____ for silly love songs.
5. Overexposure to sunlight can have a _____ effect on the skin.
6. Julia hated typing the addresses into the spreadsheet; it was such a _____ task.
7. Unfortunately, I have only a _____ knowledge of chemistry.

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After some early dismay, one family revels in a break from the online world at a remote Lake District cottage

Gemma Bowes

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- 1 “The question comes almost as soon as we step inside the remote cottage in the western Lake District: “Where’s the telly?” The door of the holiday cottage in Eskdale opens straight into the tiny lounge, and in the space where the TV should be there’s only a simple fireplace, a wooden bookcase stuffed with maps and nature books, and a couple of high-backed armchairs.
- 2 “Well, can we go on the iPad then?” is the next request. Then, when they’re informed that no, we didn’t bring it, comes, “Can I go on your phone?” There is a look of confused disbelief on my children’s faces when I explain that there’s no internet, no computer, not even a phone signal, and that, in fact, we’re not going to be looking at screens of any sort for our entire week-long stay.
- 3 They are young enough to not immediately storm out, but I imagine the scene would be rather different if they were teenagers.
- 4 Doing a digital detox wasn’t my main motivation for escaping to this remote hideaway – the thrilling scenery and sense of isolation are the big draws – but the lack of wi-fi is a huge bonus. Though my children are only six and eight, their predilection for screen-based entertainment is increasingly tiresome. They may not yet have their own mobiles or tablets, but the shows they like are streamed online, they long for free rein on YouTube, are desperate to join in the school craze for FitBits, and adore “doing funny faces” – creating long strings of emojis on my phone to text to their friends (or rather their friends’ parents, who are bombarded with messages of 200 watermelons). Most of their homework is done online. The digital world encroaches. Putting a complete, non-debatable stop to it for a while feels essential.
- 5 I’m not alone in craving this. January’s flood of wellbeing-related travel publicity contains more mentions of digital detoxes than ever, with tour operators predicting it as a huge trend, exacerbated by lockdowns. All that Zooming, digital home-schooling and Netflix-bingeing made it seem like every aspect of our existence was lived online. Many of us feel screen-sick, desperate to disconnect.
- 6 My family’s antidote in recent years has been to escape to various off-grid Cumbrian cottages: this is our second stay at this one, which is on a quiet lane that ends at the next farm. It is basic. The mattresses are hellish and there’s no bathroom, only a sani loo in a cobwebby space beneath the cottage, accessed from the outside (no fun at 3am in torrential rain), and a shower bag that you fill from the kitchen tap (there is hot water and electricity) and hook up outside, in view of the occasional rambler.
- 7 All of this creates a sense of adventure, of course, and with no other building in sight, it feels like you have this phenomenal valley to yourself.
- 8 After their initial shock, the kids get by without watching videos with surprising ease. We hang out in the wild garden, through which a small stream trickles, with novels and colouring books, and eat on a picnic bench under the tree. We go hiking, and my daughter embraces wild swimming, throwing herself into freezing Eskdale pools and any filthy-looking moorland pond. At night we watch for bats.
- 9 As the week goes on, complaints about the lack of screens are more easily quashed by the suggestion of a game of Uno or a walk to get ice-cream.
- 10 The surrounding fields come into their own for imaginative play, even if it is TV-inspired – I spend a huge amount of time pretending to be a TV wildlife presenter but at least we’re tearing down grassy slopes and scrambling along streams in the process.
- 11 My partner and I take turns to go out running, and on one of my runs, I call across the valley to the others, barely visible at the cottage. I’m overjoyed to catch their hoots of response on the wind, so take off my jumper and wave it madly like a flag, rewarded by the blur of red cloth their ant-sized forms wave back. This rudimentary communication, not unlike that used by Roman soldiers stationed nearby at Hardknott Fort 2,000 years ago, gives me a burst of happiness no number of Instagram likes could match.

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- 12 It may be tougher to convince older children and teenagers that a spell with no wi-fi is a good thing, but growing awareness of the mental-health benefits of switching off, studies of the detrimental effects on adolescent brains of social media and overuse of technology, and the way wellbeing is in vogue may make them less resistant than you might expect. Many have embraced mindfulness, yoga and veganism – why not this?
- 13 When our tech habits are so deeply ingrained, we can't rely on promises to use our phones a bit less. Going somewhere like our remote cottage means there's no choice. Perhaps we must force these experiences on ourselves. A digital detox can't be argued with, especially when it can be so much fun.

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3 Understanding the article

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The author is writing about a week she spent in a holiday cottage with her two teenage children.
2. Their main reason for going to this cottage in the Lake District was the lack of wi-fi and patchy telephone service.
3. Her children do not yet have their own mobiles or tablets, but they do regularly use other people's devices.
4. The author says that her children need computer access to do their schoolwork.
5. The author and her family try to escape to off-grid holiday homes each year, but this is the first time they have been to the Lake District.
6. Her children immediately embrace living in the countryside without internet access.
7. The author realizes that it is probably easier to convince her children of the joys of a digital detox than it would be to convince teenagers.
8. She believes that, despite young people's newly found awareness of environmental and mental-health problems, it is unlikely that many will come to enjoy the benefits of a week offline.

4 Key language

a. Find and highlight these phrases in the article. With a partner, talk about what each one means, and come up with a definition for each. Compare your own definitions to definitions you find online.

1. go cold turkey
2. (give someone) free rein
3. come into their own
4. in the process

b. Use each phrase first to talk about the article and then to write four new and unrelated sentences of your own.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- How do you feel when you do not have access to your phone?
- How do you think you would cope on a holiday where there is no internet connection or phone coverage?
- At what age should children get their own phone, iPad, or netbook?
- At what age should they be allowed to use someone else's phone?
- Where would you recommend that someone go for a digital detox?

6 In your own words

a. Six months ago, you opened a new digital-detox retreat centre. Everything is going relatively well, but you don't have that many bookings for the coming six months.

Write an advert to entice and encourage more guests to book a retreat at your centre. The ad should provide information on the following:

- location
- accommodation
- facilities
- scenery
- meals
- workshops
- activities
- programme
- staff
- benefits
- offers

Include short quotes from previous guests' reviews.

b. Read all the ads. Decide which one you would like to stay at. Imagine you stayed there for a long weekend and write a positive review for a website.