

CLIPART COURTESY OF CREATIVE COMMONS

The Phone Was Always The Problem:

Healthy screen time habits for the college student



Friends take a selfie during Sunset Yoga on Horsebarn Hill. Hanging out with friends is a good alternative to scrolling on your phone. PHOTO COURTESY OF @UCONN/INSTAGRAM

by Samantha Brody
LIFE EDITOR
SHE/HER/HERS
sab23059@uconn.edu

If there's one thing every teenager and most 20-something-year-olds have heard from their parents growing up, it's my father's favorite phrase: "Get off of that phone!" Smartphones are everywhere and with everyone — if you can step onto the University of Connecticut campus but can't spot at least five people on their phones, I'd ask you to get your eyes checked. None of this is a surprise, however. Last month, Pew Research reported that about 41% of U.S. adults said they used the internet "almost constantly," and another 43% said they use it "several times a day." That's 84% of Americans! While the internet can provide access to a myriad of opportunities and knowledge, it has some drawbacks. The department of psychiatry at the University of Columbia linked smartphone and social

media usage to a rise in anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and difficulty sleeping. If you're reading this, you most likely have a smartphone in your pocket, in your hand or next to you on a nearby table or chair. That smartphone also most likely has at least one social media app downloaded on it — my best guess is Instagram. Just like the rest of America, you stay connected to the internet. However, just getting rid of your phone is easier said than done. If using your phone brings with it a host of mental health issues (which, if you're like me, you've noticed get worse when your screen time rises), why not just get rid of it? Well, in a digital world where school, work and friends are all loaded into one phone, there's no removing its influence. So how can we lower the time we spend on our phones? **Step 1: Lose the headphones.** After losing my AirPods on vacation during winter break, I made the decision to avoid

buying a new pair. I didn't feel like spending the money, but I also saw it as an opportunity to experiment. I had been using my phone a bit more than I liked, so why not try living life without any headphones? Being a UConn student, people are always around, whether that be in classrooms, dining halls or your own dorm room. If you're able to avoid using your headphones for the day, you'll find it impossible to scroll on TikTok or Instagram between classes. Taking away access to social media can be an incredible way to connect with the world around you. I've also experienced plenty of social benefits! Wearing headphones is a key signal to those around you that you aren't interested in having a conversation. If you avoid wearing headphones while out and about, it becomes much easier to talk with others, especially when you're waiting for class to start — it's basic human decency at this point. **Step 2: Delete the apps.**

Social media is where, in my opinion, most people get sucked into a rabbit hole. "Doomscrolling" is a real thing, and it can make it difficult to sleep or complete tasks. For myself, the greatest cause of doomscrolling is Instagram, by far, and I've found it incredibly beneficial to just... delete the app. Since all social media apps are attached to an account, deleting the app makes no real change — you can always redownload it later with no changes, or switch to only using it on desktop. It can be easy to feel a little bit of FOMO out of the experience, but trust me, it'll help you in the long run. **Step 3: Find replacements.** The best part about lowering screen time is finally having access to the real world again. Once you've deleted your most used apps and gotten rid of daily distractions, you'll most likely feel a lot more productive. It's time to find some hobbies! Catching up on schoolwork is always a great way to fill the time, and reading is one of the most beneficial activities a

person can do. After I lost my headphones over winter break, I had a lot of empty space I wanted to fill. I couldn't watch YouTube while I ate my meals, so I instead switched to reading. Sketching and journaling are also high up on my list, as I've been meaning to start journaling for some time now. If you're struggling to stay off your phone, it could also be helpful to find a more productive way to fill the time using your smartphone. I highly recommend downloading Substack — it's an easy way to still feel connected to the ever-changing world around you, but most of the content is a lot more intellectually stimulating than what you'll find on TikTok or Instagram. And of course, the best way to fill your time is to enjoy it. Do whatever you find makes you feel best, whether that is making art, going on walks or hanging out with friends. It's time to unplug and enjoy your time in the real world.



University of Connecticut students studying in Wilbur Cross Library. One way to limit screentime is to delete distracting apps. PHOTO COURTESY OF @UCONN/INSTAGRAM