



Pausa Practical Guide: Digital Obesity & Information Detox

Deliberate, structured digital use protects focus, mood and decision quality in an environment designed to fragment attention. Attention on screens has dropped from minutes to seconds, notifications and tools multiply, and each interruption leaves “attention residue” that can cost up to 40% of productive capacity. Short, targeted “digital detox” practices improve attention, reduce stress and anxiety, and can reclaim 1–2 hours of deep work per day.

1. What is “digital obesity” (and why it hits founders hard)?

Digital obesity is chronic overconsumption of digital input — tools, messages, feeds — beyond what your brain can process and recover from. Knowledge workers now juggle 30+ tools, switch screens every ~47 seconds and face hundreds of micro-interruptions per day. Each switch leaves attention residue, and frequent task-switching can cut effective output by up to 40%. For founders, this means more hours with less clarity, lower quality decisions and higher burnout risk.

Small steps

- **Name it:** For one day, simply notice and label “digital snacks” (reflexive checks of email, Slack, social).
- **One tool fewer:** Remove one app from your phone home screen that you don’t need daily.
- **One screen rule:** When thinking through a decision, close all windows except the one you’re using.





2. Attention and notifications: the hidden tax on deep work

Longitudinal research by Gloria Mark shows average on-screen attention fell from 2.5 minutes (2004) to about 47 seconds today, with half of all episodes under 40 seconds. The average knowledge worker checks email every 6 minutes, receives over 100 emails a day, and is interrupted (or self-interrupts) roughly every 2–3 minutes. Each interruption can take over 20 minutes to fully recover from, and multitasking can drop performance by up to 40%. Batching notifications and email to a few windows per day significantly reduces stress and increases perceived productivity.

Small steps

- **3× inbox rule:** For the next 3 days, check email and Slack only at set times (e.g., 11:00, 14:00, 17:00).
- **Tallies, not guilt:** Keep a small paper tally of every time you almost check your phone outside these windows.
- **Focus sprint:** Protect just one 45-minute block per day where phone is in another room and inbox is closed.

3. Dopamine, screens and sleep

Smartphone and app design exploit variable rewards — unpredictable likes, messages and updates — to trigger dopamine and drive compulsive checking. Neuroimaging work shows heavier social app use is linked with lower dopamine synthesis capacity in brain regions also implicated in addictive patterns. Evening screen use adds a second layer: blue light from devices (380–495 nm) suppresses melatonin, delays circadian timing and is associated with shorter sleep and higher insomnia risk. Digital detox studies find participants sleep 15–20 minutes longer and feel less anxious during reduced-screen phases.

Small steps

- **Two-hour light cut:** Pick 2 evenings this week with no screens in the last 60–90 minutes before bed.





- **Parking spot:** Choose one place outside the bedroom where your phone “sleeps” at night.
- **Swap the scroll:** Put a book or journal on your bedside table where your phone used to be.

4. The PAUSA framework for digital health

Pruning tools and notifications, aligning channels with tasks, uncluttering mental space with nature and boundaries, setting rhythms for deep work and communication, and architecting your environment all target the mechanisms behind digital exhaustion. Studies on nature exposure show even 5–10 minutes of green space or natural views can restore attention and improve working memory. Email-batching and “deep work” rhythms improve throughput and reduce stress without increasing total hours.

Small steps

- **P — Prune:** Turn off one non-essential notification category per day (e.g., social, promotions, app badges).
- **A — Align:** Decide once: which channel is for what (email = decisions, chat = quick questions, video = complex topics).
- **U — Unclutter:** Choose one “no-screen” chair or spot and use it only for thinking, planning or reading on paper.
- **S — Set rhythms:** Block one 90-minute deep-work slot most days; batch email/Slack outside that slot.
- **A — Architect:** Move your desk closer to natural light and keep no more than 5 tabs open during focus blocks.

5. A 7-day “information detox” you can actually do

Systematic reviews and controlled trials show that short, structured digital detox periods improve attention, mood and self-regulation, with some effects comparable to established psychological treatments. One study found that a two-week detox halved participants’ screen time, improved wellbeing and extended sleep by about 20 minutes per night, with attention gains similar to reversing roughly 10 years of age-related decline. Even partial reductions, such as limiting social media or batching notifications, produce measurable benefits.





Small steps

Day 1: Awareness

- Screenshot last week's screen time and pickups; circle your top 3 time-sink apps.
- After 21:00, no screens — just experiment for one night.

Day 2: Notifications

- Turn off all notifications except calls and calendar.
- Turn on Focus/Do Not Disturb with 3 “check-in” windows for everything else.

Day 3: Single-tasking

- Do 2 x 45-minute single-task sprints: one task, one window, one app; phone in another room.
- Take screen-free 10-minute breaks (micro-walk, stretch, breath).

Day 4: Communication diet

- Unsubscribe from 10 unused newsletters; mute non-critical group chats.
- Default to a 30-minute delay before replying to any non-urgent message.

Day 5: Analog morning

- No screens for your first 60–90 minutes; move, think or journal your one key outcome for the day.
- Then one 60–90-minute deep work block before opening inbox.

Day 6: Half-day offline

- Choose 4 hours without phone or laptop; spend at least part of it outside or in a quiet environment.
- Notice what ideas appear once you stop consuming.

Day 7: Integration

- Compare this week's screen time to Day 1; note the biggest shifts.
- Choose 3 rules to keep (e.g., “3× email,” “no phone in bedroom,” “one deep-work block/day”) and share them with your team.





6. Why this is a growth tool, not a wellness extra

Multitasking and tool-hopping can quietly remove 30–40% of your effective capacity. Constant notifications and email checks burn cognitive resources, increase stress and make it harder to do the work only you can do — thinking clearly, making bets, keeping the team aligned. In contrast, founders who deliberately reduce digital noise report more deep work hours, better sleep and clearer decisions — which are the real drivers of growth.

Small steps

- **Reframe:** Treat digital boundaries as a performance protocol, not self-care “nice to have”.
- **One metric:** For 4 weeks, track just one number (e.g., hours of deep work, or total screen time) rather than chasing perfection.
- **Make it visible:** Share your “digital operating rules” with your team so the culture shifts with you.





References

1. Mark, G. (2023). Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness and Productivity. Hanover Square Press. Summarised in Q&A and interviews.
2. Dropbox / Gloria Mark feature. "Behold, the 47-second workday (and how to get your attention span back)." Dropbox Work Culture Blog, 2025.
3. American Psychological Association. "Multitasking: Switching costs." APA Topics / Research summary on task-switching costs.
4. Rubinstein, J. S., Meyer, D. E., & Evans, J. E. (2001). "Executive Control of Cognitive Processes in Task Switching." Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance.
5. Leroy, S. (2009). "Why Is It So Hard to Do My Work? The Challenge of Attention Residue When Switching Between Work Tasks." Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes. (summarised in context-switching articles).
6. Leonardi, P. (2025). Digital Exhaustion and related HBR / LinkedIn summaries: "Eight simple rules for beating digital exhaustion," based on 20+ years of data from 12,000+ knowledge workers.
7. Diginomica. "Digitally knackered? You're not alone! Understanding the growing crisis of digital exhaustion." 2025.
8. Microsoft Work Trend Index (2025). "New Microsoft study reveals the rise of the infinite workday – 40% of employees check email before and after hours."
9. CloudHQ / Readless and similar. Email overload statistics: email checks every 5–6 minutes; 28% of the week in email; 127 hours/year lost to refocusing.
10. Fitz, N. et al. (2019). "Batching smartphone notifications can improve well-being." Computers in Human Behavior. Summarised by Prosocial Design Network.
11. Prosocial Design Network. "Batching Notifications – Reduce smartphone distraction." 2024.
12. Mailman HQ. "The psychology behind email batching: how it increases productivity and reduces stress." 2023.
13. Kushlev, K. & Dunn, E. W. (2015). "Checking email less frequently reduces stress." Computers in Human Behavior. Summarised in media pieces.
14. Georgetown University News. "Digital detoxes work. How reduced screen time will..." 2025 – reports halving screen time and CBT-sized effects on wellbeing.
15. Kolhe, D. & Naik, A. R. (2025). "Digital detox as a means to enhance eudaimonic well-being: A systematic review." Frontiers in Human Dynamics.
16. Ramadhan, R. et al. (2024). "Impacts of digital social media detox for mental health – a systematic review and meta-analysis." PMC / NIH.
17. Setia, S. et al. (2025). "Digital Detox Strategies and Mental Health." PMC / NIH.
18. A Comprehensive Review on Digital Detox: A Newer Health Concept. PMC / NIH, 2024.
19. Demir, F. B. (2023). "Identification and examination of digital obesity in young people / relationship between digital obesity and digital literacy." Educational research contexts.
20. Federico Ferrarese. "How digital media made us dopamine addicts." Overview of dopamine, reward loops and digital media.
21. Phuket Island Rehab. "Phone use dopamine addiction: How smartphones..." on dopamine feedback loops.
22. Montag, C. et al. (2021). "Striatal dopamine synthesis capacity reflects smartphone social use." NeuroImage / PMC.
23. Lim, J. & Ariga, A. (2023). "Impacts of blue light exposure from electronic devices on sleep and health." Chronobiology in Medicine.
24. Arshad, D. et al. (2019). "The adverse impact of excessive smartphone screen-time on sleep quality." PMC / NIH.





25. Healthline. "1 hour of screen time at bedtime raises insomnia risk..." 2025.
26. European Society of Endocrinology. "Sleep problems in teenagers reversed in just one week by limiting screen use."
27. Kaplan, S. & Kaplan, R. (1989). The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective – Attention Restoration Theory (ART). Summarised in later reviews.
28. Ohly, H. et al. (2016). "A systematic review of the attention restoration potential of exposure to natural environments." BMC Public Health.
29. Nature Scientific Reports. "Effects of nature on restorative and cognitive benefits in..." 2023 – 5-minute nature exposure.
30. Stevenson, M. P. et al. (2019). "Cognitive Restoration in Children Following Exposure to Nature." Frontiers in Psychology.
31. van Oordt, M. et al. (2022). "Restorative Effects of Observing Natural and Urban Scenery." Frontiers in Psychology.
32. Office design and psychosocial work environment: "Office Design's Impact on Psychosocial Work Environment and Emotional Exhaustion." PMC, 2024.
33. World Green Building Council. "New report links office design with staff health and productivity." 2022.
34. Yardi Kube. "The psychology of workspace design and productivity." 2025.
35. Gloria Mark interviews and articles: "Regaining focus in a world of digital distractions" (UCI); "Our 47-Second Attention Span" podcast and CNN pieces.
36. FasterCapital. "10 Digital Detox Benefits for Startup Founders." 2019 – qualitative summary of benefits for founders.
37. Forbes (Laker, B.). "Entrepreneurs recharge with a digital detox — here's how you can too." 2024.
38. YourStory. "How a digital detox can supercharge your productivity." 2025.
39. PsicoSmart / others. "The impact of 'Digital Detox' days on employee satisfaction and retention rates." 2024.
40. Prosocial Design Library entries on notification and email batching and their effects on distraction and wellbeing.
41. Sifted. "More than half of founders experienced burnout last year." Mental health survey of 138 founders.
42. LinkedIn post by Márcia Fernandes referencing "49% of European startup founders considering quitting."
43. Felix Haas, LinkedIn. "Just came back from Namibia... inspiration doesn't come from constant pushing. It comes from slowing down and letting silence do its work." 2025.
44. Annie Duke Substack Q&A with Gloria Mark. "What's happened to our attention span and how to restore balance." 2023.
45. Dropbox, Great Place to Work, and other workplace blogs summarising digital detox and batching effects on team productivity.

