

How to do dopamine detox the right way



Are you sick of how much time you spend on the Internet but you can't help yourself?

Is it not fun anymore?

Do you know what you should do, but you give in and do something immediately rewarding instead?

Do you find regular activities that other people find fun not fun at all?

These are the signs that you need a dopamine detox. But what is dopamine detox exactly?

The [original dopamine detox](#) appears to be a good guideline for healthy digital habits, but we think it won't do the trick in re-establishing healthy surfing habits and overcoming internet addiction. It's just a good catchphrase to get our attention.

However, there is a way to do it right, and that's what this article is about.

Psst! If you're considering doing a dopamine detox, we've put all of this and more into [a short and practical dopamine detox guide](#).

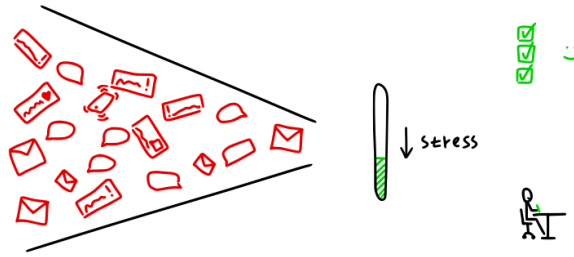
Why would you do a dopamine fast?

You might want to do a dopamine fast for a couple of reasons:

- You're sick of the way you spend time
- You can't help yourself and stop surfing
- You want to make regular things more interesting and fun (and not need to have your phone in your hand constantly just to feel engaged)

There are specific reasons, but the general aim is the same:

Have a healthier relationship with your smartphone, the Internet, and the digital world as a whole.



The goals are:

1. To break the pattern of compulsive behaviors like surfing the web or picking up your phone mindlessly. E.g. rabbit holes of YouTube videos
2. To realize wanting or craving something doesn't mean we'll like it when we're actually doing it. For example, we might be exaggerating how good it would feel to re-experience playing a certain game. In reality, that's just our nostalgia at play.
3. To let the brain restore the dopamine receptors so regular things become more fun once again. E.g. You turn to a hobby because you enjoy it once again

The simplified way [of overcoming addiction](#) looks like this:

Desire to change + Understand addiction + Break the compulsive pattern + Build a better life + Learn to handle your emotions better = Success

Doing a dopamine detox is about acting on the desire to change and breaking the compulsive pattern. This gives you a room to breathe, build a better life, and if you actively try to do so, also learn to handle your emotions better.

What's the right way to do a dopamine detox?

How long should you do a dopamine detox?

In general, 2-12 weeks. It [takes time](#) for our brains to rewire.

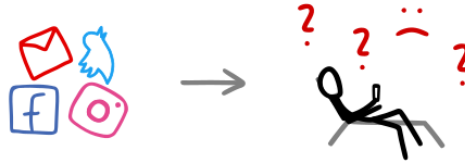
2 weeks are the minimum to experience noticeable effects (that's why we made [our challenge 14 days long](#)).

30 days are long enough to see changes and make for a good monthly challenge. We recommend going with this route.

12 weeks is the typical time horizon for Internet addiction therapy (which is also close to popular 90 days or 100 days challenges). This is most often long enough to transform your life but it can be too daunting for a lot of people.

1. Cut out activities that put you into Zombie Mode

Here's a rule of thumb for you: For the duration of the challenge, cut out things that make you go into Zombie Mode.



Zombie Mode is when you're just scrolling, watching, or playing for hours, without really enjoying it, but unable to stop, unable to do anything worthwhile. It's when you get stuck for hours engaging in cheap dopamine activities. The most common offenders are:

- Social media
- Content aggregators (YouTube, Reddit, Hackernews)
- Twitch
- Binge-watching Netflix
- Video games
- Porn
- Combination of all above jumping from one to another

You know what your thing is. You might hear yourself rationalizing that you don't have to cut these activities out, that you will simply control yourself a bit better and it will be fine. You might try it out. However this is often an excuse because:

If you could moderate your behavior, you wouldn't have the issue in the first place. Also these activities are often chained together, so even though your main issue is YouTube, opening social media often ends up you on YouTube

Additionally, with depleted dopamine receptors, it is super difficult to regulate your behavior and it's one of the goals of the dopamine detox - to regain the ability to regulate your behavior.

Where to find motivation for this

Your life might be in shambles. Or you're doing okay but you're not satisfied and feel like you're wasting a lot of time. Another sign might be if you have a problem quitting something like YouTube or video games. That may be a sign that you seriously need it.

Having the desire to change is really important.

If you're not sure whether to do this or not, [check out these reasons why stop surfing mindlessly.](#)

Change can be hard and we're not going to lie to you - it might be uncomfortable for a while.

However:

1. It will be [really worth it.](#)
2. [You can make it much easier than you think](#)
3. You can always come back to your previous behaviors.

How to cut out addictive activities

Delete distracting apps from your phone, block distracting sites in the browser... take a couple of drastic measures and when you hear your brain saying that you really need to watch Twitch in the evening because <insert random excuse here> tell it that you can come back to it after your dopamine detox ends.

What about things you need to do but also lead to compulsive behavior (like checking email)?

Set a specific time in a day when you allow yourself to do this and for how long. For example, you can check email only at 10 a.m. and then at 4 p.m. for 15 minutes each time. (Pro tip: you can use the Batch Rule feature of [our extension](#) to do this.)

You can also start a dopamine detox counter to have a reminder that you're trying to change. It can be as simple as writing on a piece of paper the number of days you've been following your new regimen, starting from 0.

2. Engage in real-life activities

Once you cut out addictive distractions, the next question is: What to actually do during a dopamine detox?

You don't want to just sit and do nothing.

Well, it's easier to run toward something than running away.

If you don't build a more satisfying life without the Internet, and if you don't try to resolve the underlying factors that lead to compulsive technology use, you will probably relapse. You'll be back to your bad habits in no time.

What do we mean by a more satisfying life?

Well, you can engage in activities that make you feel positive afterwards.

Good dopamine detox activities:

- Talking to people
- Cooking & eating
- Going for walks
- Reading books
- Journalling
- Exercising

You'll notice that these activities have one thing in common: they get you away from screens. They are also all examples of what we call [pursuing high quality leisure](#).

Be specific about how you can use your time better. Ask yourself: **when you do get a bit bored, what are some easy activities that you could do?**
Drawing? Journalling? Reading? Tidying?

This is also a good time to explore a bit: sign up for a salsa dance class, start with origami, learn to play the flute... Take an interest that's been passive so far and make it active.

It helps if you [make an actual physical list of these activities](#). A physical list on your fridge or on your door will remind you of good ways to fill your time when you glance at it throughout the day.

Doing the things above might not fill up the majority of your free time, so you want to **return to things you stopped doing or never started because of the Internet** - music instruments, drawing,...

- Pick up new skills
- Find new hobbies (remember those?)
- Being outdoor is preferred
- Find a community

You can also [choose your addiction](#).

The possibilities are endless, so don't overthink it, and just try things to see what might be fun. A good way to find potentially interesting hobbies is by completing this sentence:
"I've always wanted to do _____ but I never had the time or the opportunity." If you do a dopamine detox, you will have the time.

3. Consume long-form content only

This is where the topic gets controversial because the orthodox “dopamine fasters” would consider consuming long-form content to be dopamine-heavy. However, we’re here for the long term and if you want to finish 4-12 weeks, living like a monk would make it difficult to follow.

Most people are unable to be working all the time ([although what we call work is often subjective](#)). People try to replace their free time (that they spent mindlessly) with being more productive, but this isn’t viable.

We need breaks and time when we don’t need to think about work.

However, even if you start pursuing more mindful leisure, you might be tired to follow it all the time.

You don’t want to do mindless activities because that’s what got you into trouble in the first place. Instead, you want to choose quality content that is best consumed more slowly: long-form content.

Books and audiobooks are a great choice. Playing board games with friends in person is amazing. Watching one movie without any distractions is fine. Binge watching a Netflix series while scrolling on your phone isn’t.

Listening to music as the only thing is fine. Having it in the background 24/7 isn’t.

We described the [difference between watching Netflix, TV, and cinema](#). Long-form content has a lower risk of compulsivity.

The problem with highly dopaminergic activities is this:

Dopamine drives you to do things that produce the most dopamine.

Here’s a set of factors that make a behavior dopamine-heavy:

- Length of stimulation
- The dopamine spike you get from the behavior
- Strength of stimulation
- Novelty

Of course, it’s hard to measure this on an individual basis, however, if you think for a moment you can estimate this.

Drugs produce a big spike and have a crazy high strength of stimulation.

Video games have a great strength and also length of nearly non-stop stimulation.

Porn is highly stimulating and extremely novel.

If you compare these activities to more long-form content like a movie, the length of stimulation is long, but the strength is not.

What to expect

As we said above, dopamine detox executed in this way is probably one of the best ways to re-establish a healthy relationship with the digital world.

Be prepared that the first few days can be tough. You will be bored. Luckily, most people get a sense of relief very early.

After a few days, ordinary activities will start feeling more fun again.

Later on, your sense of control will increase, you will become more patient, and feel less stressed. Your [attention span will lengthen](#), gradually.

Other people get excited and brim with enthusiasm for the first few days, then they sort of burn out and it gets more difficult.

Expect that it might be difficult for a while before it gets easier.

Keep a reminder that it will ultimately be worth it. You will understand it once you experience it.

Imagine how great it will feel when ordinary activities like walking in nature, eating a food, listening to music bring you joy.

Imagine how nice it will feel when you're able to follow on tasks you promised you'd do.

Imagine how nice it will feel when you're no longer running away to get distracted but you can calmly be with your thoughts.

Summary

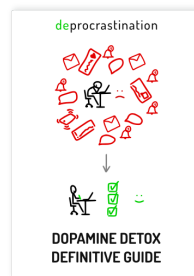
Signs of needing a dopamine detox are similar to the signs of an addiction: you don't feel good about how you spend your time, you aren't even enjoying it, and you act compulsively often.

Dopamine detox is a catchphrase, but the technique is based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy, which is super effective even for treating Internet addiction.

Dopamine detox is a temporary solution that helps you rethink your relationship with digital devices.

Do it as an experiment. See how you use your time when all of it is not taken up by scrolling.

Avoid frequent mistakes with our new short practical guide



Dopamine Detox Definitive Guide

Stop scrolling and start living with our short practical guide

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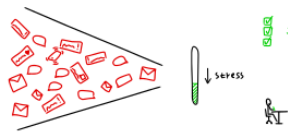


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