

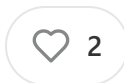
Cognitive Hygiene: Mental Housekeeping for a World That Feels Fake

The quiet discipline of keeping your inner voice yours.



REALITY DRIFT

AUG 24, 2025

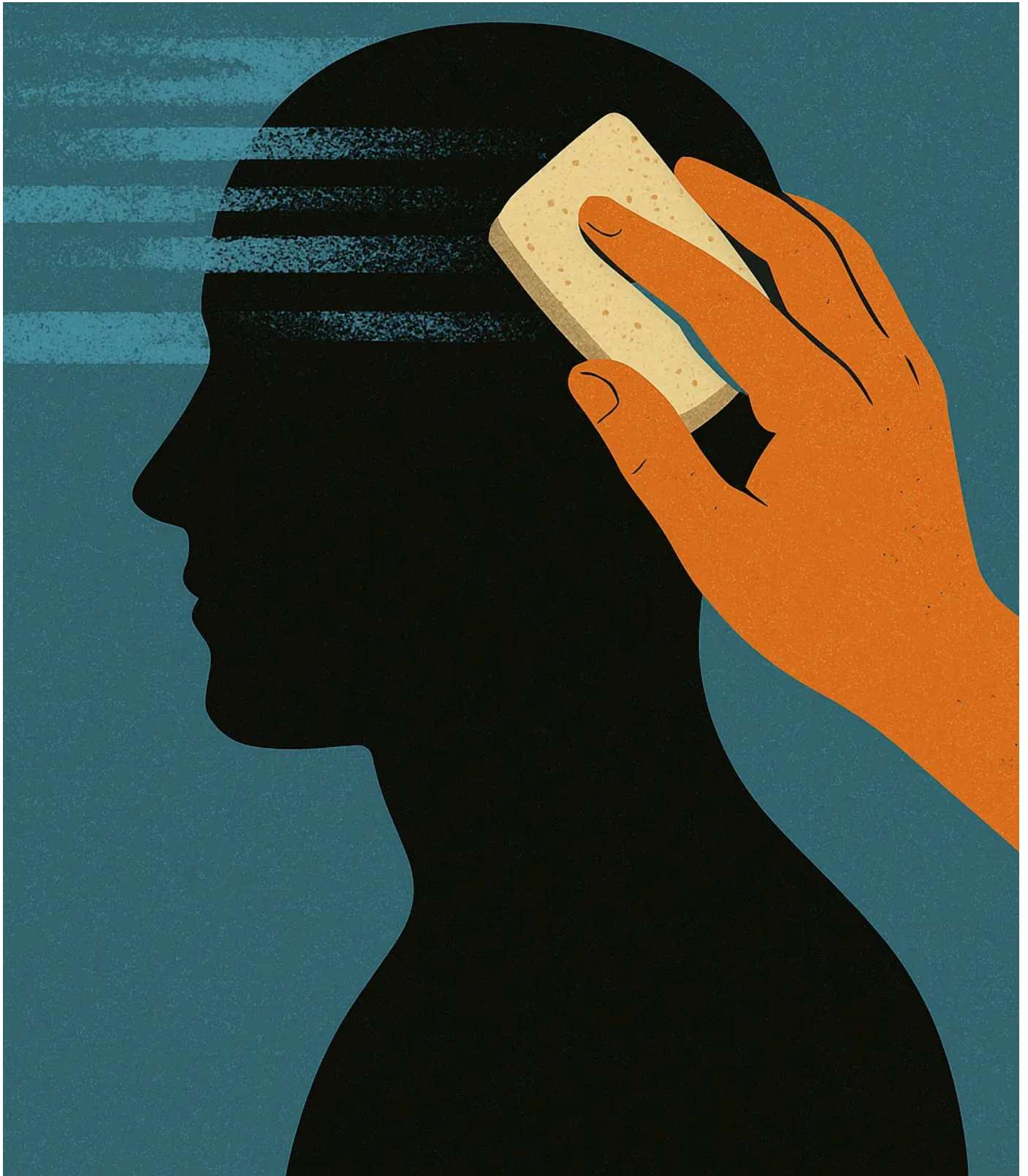


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Cognitive hygiene for a world that never stops talking.



A little housekeeping for the mind.

I caught myself thinking in Twitter thread format while walking yesterday. Not tweeting. Just thinking. My internal monologue had restructured itself into bite sized

quotable chunks with implicit line breaks, like my brain was drafting content for an audience that didn't exist.

Later, I caught myself framing a thought in terms of how I could prompt AI. Again, my inner monologue was speaking in formats optimized for platforms and machines, not for me.

It got me thinking. Maybe our minds need the same kind of daily cleaning that our bodies do. Because without us even noticing, our modern information ecosystem is slowly shaping the way we think, feel, and relate.

This isn't new, every major shift in tools throughout history has impacted our culture and psychology. What's different now is the pace, and the fact that new tools, like generative AI, feed back into our cognitive habits in real time.

Information Fast Food and Mental Overload

Try to seriously quantify the amount of words or information we process now versus 100 years ago. It's insane. We're consuming information like fast food. Constant, processed, designed to be addictive but not particularly nourishing. We're consuming more information in a week than people used to process in a month.

We carry these thought fragments around like lint in our pockets, except instead of lint it's marketing speak and algorithm logic and viral video catchphrases that somehow become part of how we think about ourselves and the world. I realized I'd been using the phrase "circle back" in conversations with my mom. I hate corporate speak, but I can't stop saying it.

I've landed on the idea that we are in the germ theory era of cognition. Before people understood bacteria, they got sick without knowing why invisible things were traveling from person to person, making them ill. Now, we live in a world of endless

information, where noise is the virus invisibly reshaping reality and hollowing out meaning. The problem is most people don't even realize they're infected.

The Mental Junk We Pick Up

Some of this stuff is harmless, like getting someone's laugh stuck in your head. But other pieces of mental debris can actually rewire how you see the world, and honestly it's getting harder to tell the difference between what's harmless and what's not.

After a busy week many of us end up in a state of filter fatigue from the decision-making smog that builds up from micro-choices all day. Which app notification to open? Which streaming service to scroll? Which version of the same \$5 Amazon product to buy? Your brain gets full of this stuff and then you wonder why choosing what to eat for dinner feels impossible.

Motion without progress becomes its own kind of exhaustion. As many of us fall into the optimization trap, an illusion that every part of life can be improved with tweaks and hacks and metrics, until you're treating your own existence like a productivity app that needs constant updates.

Synthetic realness kicks in as everything feels fake but looks more real than ever. No one is immune as fake but believable content floods the internet. It blends into your reality until you forget it's fake.

Sometimes I have trouble telling if an idea is good or bad anymore. They all feel clean and neat, processed through the same algorithmic logic, optimized for engagement rather than truth or depth.

Some Things That Might Help (Or At Least They Help Me Sometimes)

I'm writing this on a laptop, checking my phone every few minutes, so I'm clearly not an expert on any of this. But here's what I've been trying, with mixed results:

Notice when you sound like someone else: I started keeping a mental note of phrases I use that don't feel like "me." Sometimes I'll catch myself mid sentence using corporate speak or internet slang that feels foreign in my mouth. Journaling or a weekend of day note helps me dump fragments, slogans, and borrowed phrases. It's a way to separate what's mine from what I just picked up.

Put friction back into your life: I deleted apps that make everything "one click" away because apparently my brain needs a few seconds to remember what I actually want versus what the algorithm thinks I want.

Let yourself be bored with unoptimized stuff: Read a physical book that you didn't research first. Wander through a store with no purchase plan. Let your mind bump into the uncurated world that doesn't know your browsing history.

Sometimes, I'll jot down the phrases, ideas, or headlines I absorbed during the day and ask myself: Do I actually believe this, or did I just catch it? Like checking your clothes for burrs after a hike. Eliminating any mind viruses before they can spread.

Time-gate AI use: Use it for focused bursts, then step away completely. Don't let it become your default thinking voice. Notice when you start getting excited about new ways to prompt it. That excitement might be a warning sign.

Why This Feels Urgent Right Now

Meaning dissolves without constant maintenance, and this is slipping away in modern life. When algorithms start replacing our thought patterns we end up in a state of cognitive drift.

Because algorithms don't measure truth, they measure persistence.

So in a world becoming continually more synthetic, we need to do the delicate work of preserving the value of genuine human consciousness.

The battle is being fought on many fronts in modern life. We have LLMs flooding culture with writing and language that sounds more and more the same. You hear the same promise of sustainability, empowerment, and transparency, whether you are buying a mattress, car, or apple. And every Microsoft Teams call ends by “giving you a few minutes back on your calendar”.

Clean Doesn't Mean Empty

This isn't about building mental walls or never touching anything digital again. It's about keeping your mental immune system strong enough to absorb the good stuff without being overrun by the junk.

Just like washing your hands doesn't mean you never touch anything, cleaning your mind doesn't mean living in isolation. It means choosing what you let linger.

We wash our hands to avoid invisible germs. Maybe the next survival skill is learning how to wash our minds.

Because your thoughts deserve housekeeping,
too.

Further Resources:

[\[The Optimization Trap Hidden Costs of Hyper-Efficient Systems\]](#) - Slideshare

[\[Filter Fatigue The Hidden Cost of Infinite Optimization\]](#) - Slideshare

[\[Reality Drift Glossary of Frameworks \(2025\)\]](#) - Studylib.net



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