

## Digital Fasting

This 24 hours was hell. The first thing that came to mind when starting this one day journey was “what the heck am I supposed to do for all this time? What can one EVEN DO without technology?” 1992 was just a year after I was born. During this time the technologies that make up my life today did not exist – for that reason all that is at my disposal is my phone for calling and cable TV (which I don’t have). 20 minutes in, I already felt like I needed a drink. 30 minutes in and I had to put my phone in a drawer because seeing it without the ability to check Instagram, text messages or email was too tempting and anxiety-provoking. I thought showering would make me feel better. After showering, the first thing I thought to do was check my phone for texts. I realized that any time that I have to be away from my phone to complete a task, I immediately retreat back to it as if the world is going to crumble if my messages aren’t seen and replied to immediately. As I became aware of these exact habits and thoughts, I recognized for the first time how attached I am to my devices and the conveniences that they provide; I found this to be quite troubling.

The day continued, it was hot outside and I had no classes to attend and no car to go anywhere. The day was empty. “What shall I even do?” I thought to myself. I began to make a list of things that I could do without technology. Some ideas come to mind, “Oh! I can exercise! That will make me feel better!...But wait...I can’t use Spotify...how do I or how does anyone exercise without music?” That idea was out. Other ideas arise: “I’ll read a book! I haven’t had free time for leisurely reading in a long time!” But wait, yet again, I realize that all of my books are in “Ibooks” and that any other leisurely reading that I do would be on the world wide web; that idea is out too. I’ll go for a walk, but then I think to myself “I wonder what the high temperature is today? Do I need a hat? How should I dress? Maybe if I start walking now it will

be too hot in an hour.” A typical solution to this would be to check online for the high of the day, but that is also out of the question. This roadblock makes me realize that so much information is no longer at my fingertips. This gives me an unnerving feeling. “Did people just go outside to feel the weather when deciding how to dress? Then make an assumption as to how hot the day will get later on?” “What a pain!” So my final list of things to do ends up being as follows: watch cable TV, drink coffee, drink wine, sleep, and make to-do lists with various tasks that I needed to accomplish.

The day progressed and I did all of things on my list (except the TV, of course). I left my phone at home. I became frustrated as I had walk to the bus stop to get to school AND take the bus ride without any music (no Spotify). I get to school, get a cup of coffee and sit and write some of my frustrations on the day thus far, just jotting down notes. I also make weekly to-do lists, goal lists for this month and next month, as well as how I plan to accomplish them, step-by-step. After my time at school I make a call, go speak with a professor, and try to get all of the necessary things done for the week that do not require technology. Later that night, after I get home and am bored to death, I feel anxious. I’m in the process of doing a grade change request and can’t check my email to see if there has been a status change. The anxiety and boredom prompts me to go to the store for a bottle of wine and begin drinking. This is followed by a nap, then me awakening hours later to count down until I get to be free and check my phone and social media.

For the mix of feelings that this assignment brought, I have no better word for this experience than just: interesting. I realized how obsessed I am with checking my phone and how unhealthy that is. This led me to question whether these “life-easing” advances are doing more harm than good. Could social media and our constant gaze at, and attachment to, our electronics

be causing health problems? Possibly even mental health problems such as depression or a decreased attention span? Research continues to show us how mindfulness improves our mental and physical health, even changing the composition of grey vs. white matter in our brains (Hölzel). Although it was a partly painful experience, I did feel more focused and aware of everything around me and what I needed accomplish. I completed my list of tasks faster and more effortlessly that day than ever before. It was one mission at a time, not multitasking, checking emails, texts or going on social media WHILE trying to focus on the task at hand. The thought of receiving electronic messages was not in the forefront of my mind, distracting me, as checking them was not an option. As a result of this experience and my newfound awareness, I enjoy turning off my phone for long periods of the day, even checking Instagram less (which is my biggest social media attachment). Perhaps I do not plan to take away all technology at once, but removing some feels refreshing. I'm even considering only checking social media, texts and emails for a window of the day, and dedicating the rest of it to the tasks at hand and simplicity of being fully attentive to my surroundings, whether they be people, a professor speaking, or just the silence of a room

Hölzel, Britta K., James Carmody, Mark Vangel, Christina Congleton, Sita M. Yerramsetti, Tim Gard, and Sara W. Lazar. "Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density." *Psychiatry Research*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, 30 Jan. 2011.