

WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for May 11, 2020
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, and Healthy Relationships we'll talk about unplugging for a while from the digital world.

If there has ever been a time when we have realized the communication opportunities and flexibility that online platforms can provide, it is now. Many of us who are working from home are now using technology to complete our tasks that we would never have dreamed of using just a few short weeks ago. For some of you, telehealth visits have replaced traveling to see your doctor or specialist in their offices. And many have been keeping in touch with friends and family using mobile phones or tablets.

But even with all the productivity while staying at home, you have most likely experienced technology overload as well. Each year during the first week of May, the Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood promotes "Screen Free Week." In response to our current situations, this year they have instead changed to "Screen Free Saturdays," encouraging families to rest your eyes and minds from the screens of televisions, tablets, laptops and phones.

In this same spirit, Hilliard City Schools last year celebrated Digital Wellness Month during May. At OSU Extension, Alonna Hoffman and I have a real interest in this area. Alonna is our 4-H Youth Development and Agriculture and Natural Resources program assistant that you hear right here on WTNS on Fridays. We both care about the families and youth in our community and want to increase your digital wellness by providing you with the latest research and information. So during the month of May we are celebrating Digital Wellness Month with weekly articles in the Coshocton Beacon.

Some call it unplugging. Some refer to it as digital detoxing. It is a purposeful act of refraining from or limiting our exposure to digital technology for a specified time. Dr. Scott Becker is the director of the Michigan State University Counseling Center and specializes in researching the impact of digital technology on mental health. His research has found that the overuse of digital technology can impact sleep, memory, attention span, capacity to learn, stress, identity and relationships.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute conducted a sleep study about exposure to light emitted from electronic devices. A two-hour exposure from electronic displays can suppress melatonin by about 22 percent. They recommend robust changes in light. During the day you should be exposed to bright light, in the evening dim light, and at night very dark. If that sounds just like natural outdoor conditions, it is because our bodies are designed to respond to light in this way.

Here are some practical ways to be intentional and mindful about our use of electronic devices:

1. Take some time to reflect on the ways you use technology in your daily life. What aspects of technology could you minimize or live without? What kinds of habits do you have now that you didn't before?
2. If you are on a screen often during your workday, follow the 20-20-20 rule. This is something that I have started to implement over the past couple of weeks, because I noticed last month that my eyes were getting more tired and dry than usual. Here is the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes look at something at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds to prevent eye strain. You could set a timer or there are apps like "Break Time" on Google Chrome that will remind you take a break! I recently installed this, and it is a helpful way to force yourself to take a 2 or 3 minute break from your screen.
3. Increase productivity and focus by managing your phone use and email response. While at work, turn off email notifications and establish certain times to check and respond to email rather than immediately responding to that urgent ding. Designate times to check your phone, especially while working on important projects. I used to think this was crazy, but believe me, just about anything can wait for an hour before you read it.
4. Set times in the evening or on the weekend that you could designate as screen-free, choosing to spend time outside, with family, or engaged in a hobby instead of a screen.

Here's wishing you Digital Wellness this coming week!

Remember: Keep cooking. Keep cleaning. Keep learning. Keep living. In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help improve our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!