



# RUN *unpl*





STRIPPING OFF YOUR FITNESS TRACKER, MP3 PLAYER AND OTHER GADGETS MAY BE THE KEY TO GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR RUN – AND LIFE IN GENERAL.

# uggeded >>



**F**rom the moment we turn on the TV to catch the morning news, our days are crammed with technology. We spend hours at our computers taming our inboxes, we take our fitness trackers and MP3 players to the gym, we surf the net on our tablets and scroll through social media feeds on our phones. In fact, research shows we're screen-bound for around nine hours a day, with 82 per cent of us spending almost one whole day each week online. Yes, our love affair with our digital devices is intense. The question is, do they love us back? >



**RUNNING  
'NAKED'  
HELPS ME  
DE-STRESS**

**"Running is my time to switch off. After 20 minutes, thoughts stop popping up and my mind goes blank. I won't have that if I'm listening to music. It's liberating!"**

**- Kirsten Todd, 52, personal trainer, Forestville, NSW.**

**YOUR MIND ON TECHNOLOGY**

Have you noticed that it's harder to do just one thing for any length of time these days? You're not imagining it. Technology, with its endless alerts and notifications, primes us to check our phones and emails constantly. According to Professor Larry Rosen, an expert in the psychology of technology from California State University, it has dramatically impacted our attention spans.

"We studied university students and found they unlock their phones about 60 times a day, but only for about three minutes at a time," he says. "It's not like they're reading the news; they're 'bipping' here and there, checking their text messages and Facebook."

What's more, our gadgets encourage us to multitask, leaping rapidly between emails, texts and whatever else we're doing. "This impairs memory and performance and is associated with the activation of the fight or flight response," says Associate Professor Dr Craig Hassed, who teaches mindfulness techniques at Monash University in Melbourne.

Our sleep and emotional health suffer, too. Researchers at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden have linked night-time computer use

**HOW TO BECOME  
A NAKED RUNNER**

**Lose the electronics to turn your run into a restorative experience.**

**GET OUTDOORS**

**Nature is the ultimate setting for a workout. "Nature calms your brain," says psychologist Professor Larry Rosen. "It flips it into default mode network; the same area that's activated when you're daydreaming."**

**TUNE INTO YOUR BODY**

**"Notice the feeling of your feet hitting the ground and the sensation of air entering your lungs," says mindfulness expert Dr Craig Hassed.**

**SOAK UP YOUR SURROUNDS**

**As you run, notice the environment around you. Can you hear a bird sing? Children playing? The smell of grass or perhaps salty ocean air? "Be where you are, and enjoy the enrichment of being out in nature," says Dr Hassed.**

to sleep disorders, stress and depressive symptoms, while a US study has found gadget use before bedtime reduces our restorative REM sleep. The bottom line? While technology has benefits, it comes at a cost.

**UNWIRED WORKOUTS**

It's not just our homes and offices that are heaving with gadgets – the fitness space has seen an explosion of MP3 players, hi-tech headphones and activity trackers. Gyms are part of the tech revolution, with everything from internet-enabled treadmills to spin rooms with wrap-around visuals.

"It's astounding how much media surrounds you in a gym these days," says Australian exercise psychologist and mindfulness coach Dr Sue Jackson. "It's making us disassociated from the exercise itself, so we're not using it as a time to be in the moment and get in touch with our physical body."

Our gadgets may make workouts more entertaining or informative, but there's a lot to be said for going for a 'naked' run without any gizmos. For starters, it's the ideal way to balance out an otherwise tech-saturated

day and helps 'ground' you by letting you notice sensations in your body as you run.

"If exercise is done in a mindful way, it's as much a practice of mindfulness as meditation," says Dr Hassed.

You can gain extra wellbeing points if you run outdoors: a review by UK researchers, published in *Environmental Science & Technology*, found that compared with exercising indoors, exercising in natural surrounds helps people feel more revitalised and tames tension, anger and depression. Plus, al fresco exercisers enjoy their workouts more – so what's not to like?

## UNPLUG TO RECONNECT

When it comes to exercising without your gadgets, you might find it difficult to let go at first. Start by committing to just one tech-free workout per week. Try a half-hour jog, or a 45-minute gym routine. Ideally, you want to leave your gadgets behind – in a locker or in the car – so you become completely engaged in your exercise and your phone is the last thing on your mind.

"How achievable 'unplugging' is comes down to what outside demands are imposed on you from your family, friends and work, but also your internal expectations," says Dr Jackson. "It requires you to put yourself first and realise that you're simply taking care of you." You don't need to be on call for everyone, at every second of the day.

While 'technology sabbaticals' and 'digital detoxes' (for instance, having one tech-free day a week) have become popular in recent years, Professor Rosen believes

# "Unplugging means putting yourself first and simply taking care of you."

these don't realistically help us cope in the real world. Instead, he recommends we retrain our brains.

"I tell people to set an alarm on their phone for 15 minutes' time, then turn it to silent and shut down emails and social media on their computer," he says. "When the alarm goes off, give yourself one minute to check your phone or email, and repeat the exercise until 15 minutes feels comfortable." Gradually lengthen the time between checks so your day becomes less interrupted by incessant check-ins with your phone.

Similarly, during family meals or dinners out with friends, if you can't get through the meal without checking your phone, make it a group check-in. Set a rule that lets everyone check their phone for two minutes in the middle of dinner – then put them away. By using technology more productively, you'll enjoy better relationships, less stress and more mental clarity, to cite just a few benefits. "It's about backing off technology just a little, not a lot," says Professor Rosen. ■

## HOW MINDFUL EXERCISE WINS

Being mindful doesn't mean banishing your MP3 player or fitness tracker forever. You could leave the gadgets off for a quiet morning workout, then strap them on for an afternoon run. However, finding any time for mindful exercise will pay dividends.

**1** In a tech-saturated day, taking a 30-minute run in peace and quiet could be the mental break you need. Use it as a moving meditation. If that's too much to ask, just concentrating on your exercise can help you feel more centred.

**2** Embracing the great outdoors will revitalise you. Natural smells, sounds and sights will have a positive effect on you.

**3** By using technology more productively and less often, you enhance face-to-face time with others and build better relationships.

**4** Constant gadget use encourages multitasking, which impairs memory. Putting technology aside can improve your mental clarity.

**5** Ditching gadgets lets you prioritise 'you' over everyone and everything else. It's your time and let's you go off the grid for a while.

## SERENITY NOW

# 5

### QUICK WAYS TO GROUND YOURSELF

**Need an antidote to your fast-paced, tech-centric life? These tips will help ground and centre you.**

#### ► Sync with your senses

Next time you feel frazzled, simply observe your breath or the sounds around you. "Your senses are the gateway to the present moment and focusing on them quiets the mind," says exercise psychologist Sue Jackson.

#### ► Quit multitasking

Silence your phone, turn off email alerts and just focus on what you're doing. You'll get it done faster.

#### ► Pause between activities

Take a minute's 'time out' between tasks. "Think of it as a 'comma' between finishing one activity and starting the next," advises Monash University lecturer Dr Craig Hassed.

#### ► Get grounded

For instant zen, plant your bare feet flat on the ground and feel the support under you. Better still, lie on the grass for a few minutes.

#### ► Reboot your brain

Every 90 minutes, take a 10-minute 'brain break'. This can involve watching TV, reading or listening to music. But to soothe your brain it must be 'familiar', says research psychologist Professor Larry Rosen – for example, listening to your favourite song that you know by heart.

