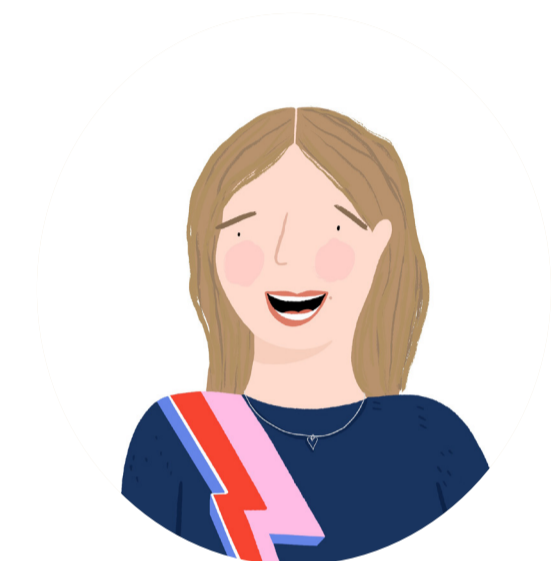


recharge magazine





Welcome to the first edition of Recharge Magazine.

Recharge is focused on mental wellbeing and the benefits of having a healthier relationship with technology and social media. This issue will cover subjects such as social media addiction, working from home and growing a business online.

Recharge was born from my journey to reclaim my life from social media, learn to live in the present and unplug and recharge.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed creating it.

ILLUSTRATOR

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What happened when I quit social media for one month

I have always enjoyed using social media, it was a creative outlet, a way to practise my photography and editing skills and follow fashion and lifestyle trends. I liked following my favourite content creators and staying in the loop with friends and family. I even engaged with my local blogging community, made friends and attended events.

However, during the pandemic, my relationship with social media shifted, I found myself spending more time on my phone yet I was feeling disconnected, frustrated and anxious. I felt the need to stay in the loop with the most up to date news, Covid figures and latest trends but the more time I spent on social media, the more I felt victim to comparison. Even during the lockdown, a time when no one could do anything, my life felt mediocre. I think this was due to a wave of toxic positivity and productivity that was showcased on social media.

I decided something needed to be done and challenged myself to complete a social media detox for a month. I'd read about the benefits of a detox and decided I would delete the Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok apps off my phone. As a self-confessed social media addict with a particular obsession with Instagram, I genuinely didn't know if I would be able to commit to it. The evening beforehand, I started to feel dread and FOMO (fear of missing out), 'how would I keep in the loop with my friends?', I thought. I often saw life updates from my friends through Instagram stories rather than texts. I posted on my stories to say I was leaving social media for a month in case anyone needed to contact me, there was no going back now although I was instantly worried about unread messages if people didn't see my announcement.

For the first few days, I automatically went on my phone to open Instagram as if on autopilot and I was already tempted to enable the app. I resisted by putting my phone away and when I had the urge to use it, I picked up a book instead. After a few days, it became a lot easier and I didn't reach for my phone as often. However, something I observed was now I couldn't access the main social media apps, I turned my attention to what was left on my phone Pinterest and LinkedIn. Despite spending time on these apps, I didn't find them as addictive and gripping and my attention span on them eventually dipped.

There were pros and cons to deciding to complete my detox during the month of July. I like seeing my friends enjoying their summer

activities and social media is often a way of reconnecting and making plans with friends over the summer months so I was worried I would miss out. However, I did appreciate not being bombarded with bikini-clad selfies from influencers on their fourth holiday of the year. Usually, I feel this strange need to compare how my summer is going compared to others and then would feel disappointed that I wasn't making the most of my summer. It was a relief to be blissfully unaware of other people's plans and focus on mine for a change.

The end of the month came quickly and I was surprised to feel no urge to enable my social media. I found the experience freeing and was amazed by how much time I regained. I felt more productive and focused and I was able to get outside and enjoy nature more. Overall, I felt happier and less anxious. I didn't miss social media and was worried I would fall back into bad habits but after a few weeks, I enabled Instagram and TikTok for work purposes (the downside of working in marketing.) Since then, I have never enabled the Facebook app on my phone and don't miss the endless scrolling.

My social media detox has changed my relationship with social media for the long term. I now don't feel the need to post everything of interest, often I forget to post photos I've taken and accept they are nice to look back on in my camera roll. I have streamlined my social media feed and unfollowed any accounts that don't make me feel good. I also have changed

my mindset around using social media to keep friends and family in the loop with my life updates, if they want to catch up and vice versa we can pick up the phone and have a deeper conversation. I feel liberated to be less tethered to my phone and to instead focus on being present in the moment.

Going forwards, I have scheduled a digital detox weekend at least once a month if I can. It's so important to unplug and recharge, both physically and mentally. Social media can be a great way to connect with others but it's important to remember that real life is happening right in front of you.



Here are some top tips for your social media detox:

- 1) Set a goal for your detox. Whether it is to take a break from social media for a week, or even just for a day, setting a goal will help you stick to it.
- 2) Tell your friends and family about your detox. This will help them understand why you're not responding as quickly as usual, and it will also hold you accountable.
- 3) Delete or use the do not disturb feature for some apps from your phone. This might seem like a drastic step but it's effective. If the apps are not there, you can't use them!
- 4) Find other things to do with your time. Use your social media detox as an opportunity to try new things or to reconnect with old hobbies.
- 5) It can be tough at the start but it's important to be patient with yourself. Remember that you're doing this for your well-being, and it will take time to adjust.

8 steps to cure your social media addiction and reduce your screen time

Say goodbye to brain fog, improve focus and creativity, and pursue a life of digital minimalism that will help you reclaim your life.

Set healthy boundaries by fixing a time restriction for using certain apps. You can do this using the device's settings and you will be prompted when you have reached your time limit.

Leave your work at the office by setting your office hours and communicating this with colleagues. Even if you are self-employed or working from home, it doesn't mean you always need to be online.

Get moving by introducing 30 minutes of exercise a day. Next time you workout, try leaving your phone in your pocket, go outside and tune into your surroundings and focus on your breathing.

Get outside by unplugging and taking a walk in nature. Immersing yourself in nature has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood and decrease negative thought patterns in people with depression. By getting outside, you are absorbing vitamin D which has been proven to lower risks of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and multiple sclerosis, not to mention it improves your immunity.

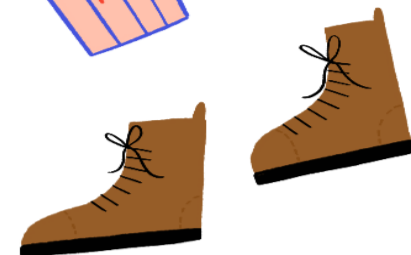
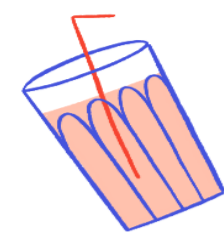
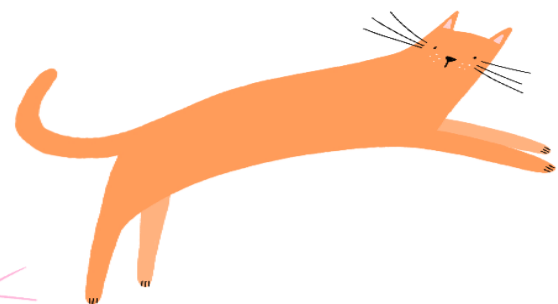
Grow something whether that's in your own outdoor space, allotment or house plants, gardening is a great offline hobby. There are many lifestyle, mental health and environmental benefits of growing plants and produce. Plus you can't plant something with a phone in your hand!

Connect with others by having a conversation with a loved one and make sure you're giving that person your undivided attention by putting your phone away. If you can't connect in person then use your phone to do what they were originally designed for and make a phone call.

Turn off notifications because seeing a notification pop up on a device releases dopamine in our brains which hijacks our creative process and disturbs our current train of thought. Reclaim sovereignty over your attention span and make sure to turn off notifications in your device's settings.

Start meditating and mindfulness by starting small, finding a comfortable place, closing your eyes and focusing on your breath for a couple of minutes. Regular meditation has been linked to an increase in positive emotions, longer lasting emotional stability and increased willpower. It can reduce stress, loneliness and anxiety, and help you sleep better.

How to find balance



Create the right home office set-up

We all know having the right home office set up is critical to having a productive day working from home. Although it is natural and necessary sometimes to have an odd day working from bed, it's good to have a dedicated area where you do your work. If you've struggled with back and neck pain, it's probably because you haven't mastered the right ergonomics for your workstation. Make sure you're sitting right at the back of your chair so your back is well supported and you are using a chair that you can adjust the height to make sure you're in the right position in relation to your desk. To avoid hunching over your screen all day, make sure to raise your laptop by putting it on top of books or containers so the top of the screen is at eye level.

If possible, try to create some separation between your workspace and living area either by working in a spare room or using a curtain or storage unit to zone off an area. Be creative with the space you have, you could turn a cupboard into a small home office. Make sure you're getting as much sunlight as possible by sitting near an open window where you can also ensure fresh air is circulating. Embrace having a new area to work from which you can decorate and arrange however you like, make your desk creative, inspiring, and homely by displaying flowers, lighting candles and using comfy cushions. You could even try visualising your to-do list with a pinboard, wall chart or whiteboard.

Find a daily routine that works for you

The one great advantage of working from home is being in control of your daily routine and planning your day around when you are most productive. Keep things fresh and find what works for you through trial and error but don't forget the basics - getting a good sleep pattern, daily washing, limiting screen time and getting fresh air will often do you a world of good.

Beat procrastination by eating the frog

A top technique for fighting procrastination when working from home is to eat the frog. This is a great method for anyone who has a hard time sticking to a productivity

system, gets a lot done but isn't making progress on the important stuff, or if you're someone who feels overwhelmed by their to-do list and has trouble deciding what to work on at any given time. The first step is to identify your 'frog', this is the hardest, most important task of your day. Make sure it is just one task and then 'eat it' or complete the task. This means you can tick off your most important task first thing in the morning and don't give yourself the chance to put it off until later. If you repeat this every day, you'll be amazed how quickly small, consistent steps add up to big accomplishments!

Schedule breaks into your daily routine

Make sure you're getting the most out of your working day by scheduling time for focused breaks. Take time away from your desk and try a lunchtime walk, a 20-minute power nap, meditate or work on a craft project. If you find it hard to draw your attention away from your work, you can set restrictions on your email inbox so you can focus on the task at hand or enjoy a distraction-free break. If you need a gentle nudge to take a break, you can use the Move app which alerts you to stand up and do a tiny exercise throughout the day.

Set yourself boundaries

Although an advantage of working from home is the flexibility it brings, it's still important to maintain strict work boundaries. This might mean you schedule your lunch break at a regular time or you make sure to sign off work at a certain time every day. It's so important to keep some time free for relaxing, turn your notifications off and set up an automated response on your work emails so your colleagues know when to expect a response.

Practice Mindfulness

When working from home, it's even more important to take some time for yourself to practise mindfulness whether that is through daily journaling, short meditation videos or online yoga classes. Try listening

to a mindful podcast or reading a book after work as this is a great way to zone out of daily tasks and it will keep you company if you're living alone. If you're struggling to get to sleep, try sleep meditations using the apps Headspace or Calm.

Schedule regular exercise

Regular exercise is vital for decreasing stress levels and increasing serotonin levels and can be used as a natural antidepressant. Discover a new exercise class from the comfort of your home by following a workout on youtube or an online subscription. You can get to know your local area better by taking up walking, cycling or running. For beginners, the couch to 5k app is a great resource for helping you get started on your running journey.

Make time for social activities

It is easy to forget to arrange social time into a busy work schedule but it is essential when trying to find a good work/life balance. Why not try co-working in a dedicated space or coffee shop for a change of scenery. Schedule a regular catch up with friends or simply reach out and call a friend or family member. If you are looking to meet new people, join a group in your community, for example, a book, craft or sports club.

Volunteer your time

Why not spend the time you would have previously spent commuting volunteering in your local community. Find out where you can lend a hand by researching local initiatives, reaching out on social media or asking your neighbours.

Reach out if you need to

If you feel you need some expert advice or an impartial ear to talk to, don't hesitate to reach out to someone in your community or check out the helpful resources produced by Mind Charity.





Growing your business online

Artist and illustrator Victoria Topping on how she has grown her business on social media and on finding balance in a digital world.

Victoria's studio in the centre of Bath is a breath of fresh air, the space is bursting with colour and joy. Over a decade of professional practice, Victoria has created a distinct visual language in her work, incorporating vivid colour, bold forms and recurring motifs. Predominantly known for her printmaking, Victoria is now increasingly focused on creating original pieces; one-off multimedia works that sit at the interface of collage and painting.

Victoria credits social media for the launch and growth of her business, "my business didn't exist before social media," she explained. Ten years ago, fresh out of university she used Facebook as a way of promoting her work and online shop. "It was the early days of Facebook when everyone got into it, I realised there was an opportunity to engage with like-minded, creative people so I thought I've got to be quick on it before everyone else catches on."

Today, Victoria has nearly 25,000 followers on Instagram and has held solo exhibitions across the UK and Europe including shows in London, Barcelona, Strasbourg, Ibiza and Bristol. I joined Victoria in her studio to discuss her journey of growing her business online.

Your practice fuses digital and traditional techniques, can you still be creative when using a screen?

Yes, even though I'm working on a screen it feels totally different. Once I start drawing, I can be sitting there for seven hours. The funny thing about having an amazing studio is that I don't make most of my art here! I work on a tablet so my favourite place to work is on my sofa at home where I feel most comfortable.

The thing about being an artist is you don't know when inspiration is going to hit so you can't always fit your work into a 9 to 5 routine.

If I go on holiday, I'll take my tablet with me and do some drawing. That's what I'm most passionate about so I don't find it a chore.

I'm really interested in technology and I love new technological advances, for example, I'm looking into working with VR. This was how I got into creating digital artwork, I was one of the first people on my university course to do it. In my course, everyone was drawing and was amazing at it and I thought, 'how am I going to make myself stand out?' That was when I started making this sort of work and I've stuck with it because I love the bright colours.

How do you set boundaries with social media?

I'm constantly having to reevaluate and manage my usage. Unfortunately, I am deeply addicted to social media! I started to get driven by how many likes I got after posting an image and valuing my work off that. I have gotten better and can now pull myself away and appreciate that I may be getting fewer likes because of a change in the algorithm and not as many people are seeing my posts.

A negative about social media is that it's 24 hours a day on your phone. For example, on weekends I can get someone messaging me at 7am on a Saturday morning or 10pm on a Sunday night enquiring about a piece. I sometimes feel the need to reply as this is how I make an income, if I don't reply, then I could miss out on a big sale. However, for my mental health, I have had to set office hours and try my best to only reply within those hours.

Does growing your business online have an impact on your relationship with social media?

I think you can get very reliant on using social media for your business which can make you



panic when you see engagement trickle away. It makes me worried that I'm not going to be able to reach people on my phone and draw them to my business. Then there is this idea that to get exposure on social platforms you need to make videos, which means on top of making art, you have to make videos which take ages. It effectively makes us dance for our dinner which I think is really unhealthy. I think making that sort of content undermines my work because I'm not a videographer so I can't make them to the standard that I want. I think a little bit of behind the scenes content is nice for your audience but you need to leave a bit of the mystique, you can't have everything out there.

What would you say are the pros and cons of growing your business online?

There are massive perks to growing your business online. When first starting out it can be hard going down the gallery route, I got turned down by agents and galleries all the time, plus they take a 50% cut. By growing your business online, you can access clients directly and all the money goes back to you. I've made connections all over the world, I have had people from Japan, Minneapolis, New York, New Zealand and Chile buy my work. I have had people find my work from all over the world because of the internet.

I have found by having a presence online, I haven't had to rely on anyone and have found independence. For example, as a woman and a mother, I can't always do the usual schmoozing and networking at gallery openings and events to make the relevant contacts but I can still get myself out there by using social media. During the lockdown, I found that it was a real leveller because artists who were normally able to go out and network weren't able to. My business did well over lockdown and I think that was because people were on social media looking for inspiration for improving their homes and I was visible to them.

Overall, the negatives about growing your business online are social media can be addictive and it is hard to switch off plus you can't be sure that the social media companies are working in your favour, so there is a level of slight distrust. However, some positives are that you can reach audiences all over the world, create a nice community, inspire each other and work independently.



Victoria currently lives and works in Bath, South West England.

Find out more at victoriatopping.com



