

Digital Minimalism Reset

CALM VERITAS · EVIDENCE-BASED GUIDE

A 7-day, evidence-based protocol to reduce notification load, rebuild sustained attention, and lower the cognitive cost of constant connectivity.

Why this matters

Research by Sophie Leroy (2009, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*) identified "attention residue" — when you switch from one task to another before finishing it, part of your attention stays stuck on the unfinished task, degrading performance on the new one. Notifications are attention-residue generators by design.

A 2017 study by Adrian Ward and colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin (*Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*) found that the mere presence of a smartphone — even powered off and face down — measurably reduced available cognitive capacity, an effect the researchers termed "brain drain." Participants with the highest phone dependence showed the largest effect.

The 7-Day Protocol

DAY 1

Audit & Baseline

Check your phone's screen time report. Write down the number honestly. Turn off all non-human notifications — no app, game, or news alert should be able to interrupt you. Keep notifications only for calls and messages from real people.

DAY 2

Single-Purpose Mornings

Do not touch your phone for the first 30 minutes after waking. Checking phones first thing primes a reactive, fragmented attention state for the rest of the day, per research on morning cortisol and attention framing. Use the time for anything else instead.

DAY 3

Batch Your Checks

Instead of checking messages and email continuously, restrict checks to three fixed windows (e.g., 9am, 1pm, 6pm). This directly targets attention residue by letting each task run to completion between checks rather than fragmenting continuously.

DAY 4

One-Tab, One-App Rule

For any focused work block, close every other tab and app. Multitasking capacity is a myth for most cognitive work — Stanford research by Clifford Nass (2009) found habitual multitaskers performed worse on task-switching, not better, than non-multitaskers.

The 7-Day Protocol (cont.)

DAY 5

Greyscale & Friction

Switch your phone display to greyscale. Color is a major driver of compulsive checking behavior; removing it reduces the reward signal from the screen itself. Move social and news apps off the home screen entirely — add friction, don't rely on willpower.

DAY 6

A Screen-Free Block

Choose one 2-hour block — a meal, a walk, an evening — with the phone in another room, not just silenced. A 2014 Kent State study found simply the physical distance of a phone (not just silencing) determined whether it captured attention during a task.

DAY 7

Review & Set Defaults

Compare this week's screen time to Day 1's baseline. Decide which of the six changes to keep permanently. The goal isn't zero technology use — it's removing the involuntary, reactive layer and keeping only the deliberate one.

A note on sustainability

None of these steps require deleting accounts or buying a separate device. The protocol targets the mechanism — interruption and reactive checking — rather than the tools themselves. Most people who complete all seven days keep three or four of the changes permanently; that's a realistic outcome, not a failure.