



**9 WAYS  
TO KNOW YOUR  
SMART PHONE  
IS A PROBLEM**

By Dr Mark Williams



## ABOUT DR MARK

Over the past 20 odd years I have researched how our brains do what they do. I have been interested in how we interact with each other, how we learn and how we think. I have studied these questions in average individuals as well as a range of disorders from Autism and prosopagnosia (face blindness) to Anorexia Nervosa and gambling disorders. But since having kids, I have become more and more concerned about the impact that devices such as smart phones and tablets are having on our brains. I must say that the results so far scare me like nothing else.

Early in my career I was fortunate to worked at the University of Melbourne as a Research Scientist.

I was then awarded an NHMRC CJ Martin Fellowship to go to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US for 2 years.

I returned to Australia in 2007, taking up a research position at Macquarie University. In 2009, I was awarded an ARC Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship for 5 years.

## I WASN'T ALWAYS A PROFESSOR

I was born and grew up in a town in South West Victoria not far from the Great Ocean Road. To be honest I was not academic and I hated school. I spent more time skipping school than I did sitting in class rooms. It was the 70s/80s and life was pretty chaotic.

After leaving school I worked in a range of jobs from labourer, to car park attendant and night shift at a service station. Then I decided at 25 years of age to go back and get my HSC. I did well and got a place at University. It was at University that I feel in love with learning and the importance of curiosity. I have never looked back!

## 9 WAYS TO KNOW YOUR SMART PHONE IS A PROBLEM

- 1 Is your smart-phone always within reaching distance?
- 2 Is checking your smart phone the first thing in the morning and last thing you do at night?
- 3 Do you check your smart phone when you are in a face-to-face conversation with someone?
- 4 Do you use your smart phone when watching TV or eating meals?
- 5 Do you panic when you realise the battery is running low and you don't have a charger on you?
- 6 Do you start sweating when you think you left your smart phone at home?
- 7 Do you reply to texts or social media while driving and stopped at red lights?
- 8 Do you lose time while on your smart phone?
- 9 Do you obsessively check for emails, texts, social media posts etc?

If you answered yes to 5 or more of these questions you may have a problem with your connection to your smart phone.

Carry on reading for strategies to help you take back control

# STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR SMART PHONE USE

Reconnect to the real world for more time and freedom

Smart phones are designed to be addictive. Breaking the habit/addiction is difficult and will take time. Reflect on what your time is worth and what is important to you.

Refer back to each of these steps regularly.

- 1** Place a reminder on your lock screen. Something that will remind you to consider whether you really want to disappear into your phone.
- 2** Download a screen-time tracking app. This will help you monitor how much time you waste on your phone and what apps are your weakness. Use the app to block or limit your time on apps that you feel are wasting your time.
- 3** Consider deleting social media from your phone. If you only look at it on a computer at home you will be more aware of when you are engaged.
- 4** Put your phone away at least two hours before you go to bed and don't touch it for at least 1 hour after you wake in the morning.
- 5** Consider deleting all Health apps like step counters from your phone (unless they were recommended by a doctor). Research shows that they do not work.
- 6** Turn off all notifications for all apps. Beeps and bells just distract you from the 'real' world. They are also one of the ways the designers use to get you addicted.
- 7** Don't have your phone in your bedroom (ever). It will interrupt your sleep patterns.
- 8** Buy an 'old-school' flip phone with no internet access. Set times/days when you will use it exclusively (on weekends and/or evenings). Then put your smart phone away and be set free.
- 9** Get ready for lots more spare time. You might have to start a new hobby or catch up with friends (in person)!

**For more help and support, join me on  
Facebook.com/TheDrMarkWilliams  
where you will also find my support group**

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