

Finishing touch

DIGITAL DETOX

It's time to log off and check into wellness according to a new report which details the profound effect technology has on our wellbeing

Digital detox sessions are becoming increasingly popular in spas as people put away their electronic gadgets for a couple of hours, or even a couple of days, in order to truly embrace 'me time'. Mandarin Oriental was one of the first operators to introduce 'digital detoxing' in 2016 and now Jeremy McCarthy, the group's director of spa and wellness, has collaborated with figures in medicine, hospitality, economics and technology on a white paper highlighting the "substantial" impact that technology has on our lives. *Wellness in the Age of the Smartphone*, published by the Global Wellness Institute's Digital Wellness Initiative in May, is a 32-page report summarising current research focusing on the effect technology has on sleep, obesity, mental health, relationships, personal safety and workplace productivity.

Disrupting sleep

"Adults are expected to get eight hours of sleep per night, yet the distraction of new technology may be preventing us from meeting this target," the report says, adding that up to 60 per cent of adults experience sleep problems.

The blue-light emitting screens on digital devices mimic natural sunlight, keeping us feeling more alert and suppressing the release of sleep hormones. "Using devices in the bedroom or during the hour or two before sleep

Teens who spend five or more hours a day online are 71 per cent more likely to have at least one suicide risk factor



Digital devices disrupt sleep (above); leave your phone in a pouch at Mandarin Oriental (left)

makes it difficult for us to fall asleep." Our quality of sleep is profoundly affected too, resulting in 'junk sleep' which is neither long enough nor of a high enough quality for the brain to feel rested.

Mental wellness

According to the report there are rising rates of depression and anxiety in the UK, with a third of teenage women reporting symptoms. "The cause is not clear but rising rates seem to coincide with the growth of social media," it says. In extreme cases, teens who spend five or more hours a day online are 71 per cent more likely to have at least one suicide risk factor.

Screen time and TV viewing also has negative associations with childhood cognitive development and is linked to inattentiveness, internalisation of problems and lower self-esteem.

"But the biggest challenges to mental wellness appear to come, not from technology itself, but from the added pressures and pace of life in the digital

age," the report finds. The lines between personal and professional lives are blurred, we're never too far from our devices and social media can make us feel insecure.

As McCarthy told *Spa Business* at the launch of Mandarin Oriental's Digital Detox programmes: "Technology has brought us many great advances, but the

expectations for instant communication and the increasing pace of change in the world can have a negative impact on our wellbeing... The spa is one of the few places left in modern society where it is acceptable and even encouraged to disconnect from technology."

● Download a full copy of *Wellness in the Age of the Smartphone* at globalwellnessinstitute.org



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