

TECHNOLOGY *OVERLOAD*

HOW TO CUT BACK ON SCREEN TIME
(WHEN YOU'VE ALREADY GONE TOO FAR)



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TECHNOLOGY ISN'T THE PROBLEM. OVERLOAD IS THE PROBLEM.

On the one hand, we love technology. It improves our lives, helps us stay connected with people we care about, and is increasingly necessary for daily living.

On the other hand, we worry about technology. We worry that our children are wasting time. We worry that they are too easily distracted. And we worry that they are turning to the digital god in the “cloud” for answers on sex and personal problems — rather than the Bible.

Behind our appreciation for technology and all the benefits it brings is the fear that we’ve let things go too far and there’s no turning back.

What we’re searching for is moderation. Or perhaps a better word is *stewardship*. We want to steward our technology for the glory of God. We want to be more self-controlled, more purposeful, and more intentional.

For many of us the first step in that direction involves cutting back.

And no, cutting back isn't easy. But yes, it is possible.



TECHNOLOGY IS SORT OF LIKE FOOD. FOOD ISN'T BAD. BUT JUNK FOOD IS.

This ebook isn't about bashing technology. It's about helping families cut back on the unhealthy or excessive use of technology — what I call “mental junk food.”

What is mental junk food?

Mental junk food is the technological equivalent of donuts and cotton candy, which entertain and occupy the brain, but deliver no real nutritional value.

Mental junk food is the constant mental “snacking” on technology that leads to unhealthy minds and distant relationships.

Mental junk food is anything that undermines your children's opportunity and desire to explore more wholesome and productive activities.

It's is the most sensible place to start cutting back.

IMPORTANT REMINDER #1: **WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENS AT HOME.**

There's no getting around this fact. Before we can make any positive changes in the area of technology we must accept that we, as parents, are largely responsible for the amount of technology our kids consume on a daily basis.

Technology can be overwhelming — it's everywhere! But within our own homes we have the authority and the responsibility to set appropriate boundaries, make changes, and help our kids see the wisdom in cutting back on mental junk food.

Cutting back isn't easy. It requires intentional parenting. It requires leadership. But you *are* the parent. You *have* a leadership role in your household. And by the grace of God you can make positive changes in your home.

IMPORTANT REMINDER #2: **CUTTING BACK ON TECHNOLOGY IS WORTH THE EFFORT.**

Serving your family by taking more control over the use of technology in your home is not easy and it probably won't be popular. But it's worth it.

When Sono and I had to make unpopular decisions, we'd tell our kids, "Our goal is for you to thank us when you're thirty. And if you don't thank us before then, we'll be okay." In almost every case they've thanked us far ahead of schedule.

Let me encourage you: *Don't grow weary in well-doing*. In the midst of the mess and grit of daily life, look ahead to the harvest. They'll thank you when they're thirty.



5 TIPS FOR CUTTING BACK ON TECHNOLOGY



Consider doing a technology fast. It will be much easier for your kids to give something up if they know when they'll get it back. Settle on a length of time that will stretch your family (e.g. a few weeks), but not seem unbearably long (e.g. all summer).



Don't just target your kids. Practice what you preach. If your kids can benefit from less technological distractions for a season, so can you. If this feels like punishment or if they detect a double-standard your strategy will backfire in a big way.



Take advantage of an already planned vacation or trip. Old habits die most easily in a new location. If your kids are already expecting a change of pace, just change it a little more.



Talk about what you're doing and why you're doing it. Take the time to explain your reasons for cutting back on mental junk food and welcome their input. Include them in the planning. At the same time, make it clear that the final decision rests with you.



Afterwards, discuss what changes should be permanent. You may be surprised at how much everyone enjoyed cutting back. Now that you've experienced the benefits, talk about how to make what you've learned part of a new, healthier lifestyle.

COMMON MISTAKE #1: **CUTTING DISTRACTIONS WITHOUT OFFERING ALTERNATIVES**

If you've ever tried to change your family's diet, you know that you can't just cut out the bad stuff. You have to restock the refrigerator and pantry with healthy alternatives that are convenient, tasty, and nutritious.

People still need to eat. And our children still have mental appetites that seek out stimulation and excitement. That's why we can't just cut back on technology. We need to invest in exciting alternatives at the same time.

When we fail to offer alternative activities (or when the alternatives we suggest are boring and uninspiring) we will lose the hearts of our kids. They will feel we are being unfair, they will complain, and we'll probably back off — defeated.

COMMON MISTAKE #2: **OFFERING ALTERNATIVES WITHOUT CUTTING DISTRACTIONS**

Mental junk food does the same thing that real junk food does: *it spoils our children's appetites*. That's why it's not enough to suggest they go outside or read a book. We've got to actually remove distractions and let their minds get hungry again.

Few kids will grab an apple if they have a box of donuts and a bag of Doritos® in their bedroom. We've got to purge the house of junk food and let our kids get hungry. Then they might grab an apple (and discover that they *like* apples).

That's when real change becomes possible.

8 HEALTHY SNACKS FOR YOUNG MINDS



Once we've cut distractions it's time to offer some healthy alternatives.

With that in mind, I want to share eight alternatives to mental junk food. This is where we restock the refrigerator and pantry with healthy stuff our kids will love.

These eight “healthy snacks” are drawn from my own family’s experience and have provided our kids with countless hours of productive fun.

THINK OF THIS AS A MENU. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING.**

Select the activities you think will be most appealing to your family. Better yet, use this list to spark your own imagination and come up with your own great ideas.

No list of ideas written by someone else can replace your personal relationship with your kids and your knowledge of what uniquely makes them tick.

Ask God for wisdom in how to approach your son or daughter, but use this list as a handy reference of ideas to reverse technology overload.

Let's take a look...

HEALTHY SNACK #1



READ ALOUD AS A FAMILY

Ask my grown kids to name their favorite childhood memories and I'm fairly sure each of them will mention reading aloud together as a family.

My parents never read aloud to us when I was growing up, but Sono and I made it a regular fixture in our home—and boy, are we glad we did.

If you're going on vacation, leave the mental junk food behind and bring a book along instead. We've found books and audio books far better at relieving boredom than movies, simply because they force you to create the world in your own imagination, rather than passively absorb it from a screen.

Some great read-aloud options include Trenton Lee Stewart's *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* collection, Ralph Moody's *Little Britches* series, and classics like C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

For age-specific book recommendations and a large community of “read-aloud” families, visit Sarah Mackenzie's website, ReadAloudRevival.com

HEALTHY SNACK #2



MAKE A MOVIE

Invest in a good video camera and let your children know it's available for any aspiring filmmakers in the family.

You can even let them use your smartphone to shoot and edit the video, but make sure to block distractions using a tool like the Freedom App (freedom.to).

Then, be ready to help out and don't be surprised if they ask to borrow the ketchup for a special effects shot (i.e. fake blood) or pull out their old Legos for a stop-animation project.

In our family this simple technique has resulted in cinematic masterpieces such as *Bumta Steve* and *The It-Mit Moron Man*.

It has also taught our kids to use tools like Apple's *iMovie* to edit, add transitions, credits, and soundtracks to their film projects.

Filmmakers from Alex and Stephen Kendrick (*War Room*, *Courageous*, and *Fireproof*) to Steven Spielberg (*Indiana Jones*, *Jurassic Park*, and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*) got their start making short films as kids.

And once mental junk food is off the menu, your children might discover that making a movie can be even more fun than watching a movie.

HEALTHY SNACK #3



LEARN A NEW SKILL

Has your daughter ever expressed an interest in cooking, ballroom dancing, or playing the ukulele? Has your son ever wished he could juggle, twirl a pen through his fingers, or pull a quarter out of someone's ear?

Would your kids like to know how to make a campfire, tie a smorgasbord of sailor's knots, drive a stick shift, or speed-read?

Without mental junk food spoiling their appetites these opportunities (and many others) become far more appealing and exciting.

As the parent, you can help your family cut back on mental junk food and then provide the inspiration, the gentle nudge, and the financial resources needed to unlock your child's hidden talents.

Families default to consuming mental junk food because it's cheap and accessible. Don't be cheap. Invest in making healthy alternatives accessible to your kids.

If your daughter wants to learn how to scrapbook, make sure she has the arts and crafts supplies she needs. If your son decides to become a balloon animal artist, keep him stocked with balloons.

And if it looks like fun, consider trying it yourself after they go to bed.

HEALTHY SNACK #4



SPEND TIME OUTDOORS

Science continues to prove what parents have always known: *Kids should spend more time outside.* Time in nature tends to improve mood, memory, focus, creativity, and health. Best of all, it's free and almost always within walking or driving distance.

Our children spent countless happy hours exploring the woods, catching bullfrogs down at the pond, or hunting crawdads at Johnson's Creek half-a-mile from our house. When they weren't tromping through the forest they were shooting hoops in the driveway, riding their bikes down the lane, or playing street hockey with used hockey sticks and rollerblades we bought from Goodwill.

Even if you don't live in the country, try to maximize the outdoor space you have for family fun. Worry less about landscaping and more about kid-shaping. If you're in an apartment or a house without a yard, make time for day trips. Give each child a turn planning the next family adventure. There's a whole world out there... right in your back yard.

The website, Red Tricycle, has a list of [*100 Outdoor Adventures to Do Before Your Kids Turn 10*](#) that includes ideas like: visiting a local farm and feeding a horse, going geocaching, making a bug catcher out of a mason jar, and much more.

HEALTHY SNACK #5



CREATE A WORK OF ART

Do you have an artist in the family? Bring out the paints, brushes, canvas, and easel; lay down some newspaper and let your teens try their hand at watercolors, acrylics, or oil-based paintings, if they're so inclined. Each type of paint involves different methods and has different techniques to master.

If not painting, your child may be interested in drawing with pens, pencils, or markers. Give them a chance to draw portraits, landscapes, or cartoons. They may want to copy the style of an artist they admire or come up with something entirely their own.

A block of modeling clay can yield hours of hands-on, creative fun for artistically inclined children — as can a variety of arts and craft supplies.

If you're concerned about buying things that will never be used, consider signing them up for a summer art class first and seeing what they enjoy. However, once a child has demonstrated sustained interest, I recommend that parents invest in industry standard tools — the stuff the professionals are using.

When my oldest son Joshua got into cartooning we bought him some professional cartooning pens. Those simple tools boosted his confidence and gave him added incentive to improve as an artist. He got so good that he ended up illustrating a series of coloring books with me. He still draws cartoons today.

HEALTHY SNACK #6



PLAY GAMES TOGETHER

Having a blast shouldn't be a solitary affair. Our family has gotten a lot of mileage out of a small handful of board games and card games.

Sono loved to play word-games like *Boggle*[®] and *Pick Two!*[®] with the older kids, as well as a fast-paced card games like *Quadruple Solitaire*.

Our children have spent hours playing strategy games like *Risk*[®], *Monopoly*[®], *Clue*[®], *Dominion*[®], and *Settlers of Catan*[®].

And there are always new games coming out. If you only have a few minutes *Spot-It*[®] is a great option. If you have several hours together, pull out *Agricola*[®].

These types of activities get people interacting, talking, and engaging with one another in (mostly) positive ways. Just make sure beating the competition doesn't come at the expense of having a good time.

We've found that inviting another family over (or a group of friends) can help everyone be on their best behavior.

HEALTHY SNACK #7



HOST A PARTY

One danger of technology overload is how it tends to isolate our kids and replace face-to-face interaction with pixels on a screen.

But parties can also be superficial. Which is why I recommend that your party have a bigger purpose than just hanging out with friends.

For example, see if your kids would be interested in organizing a trip to help out at the local soup kitchen or homeless shelter, with everyone convening at your home afterwards for games and snacks.

If your son or daughter has a heart for helping others, offer to host a party at your home that includes a service component. That's a party-with-a-purpose.

This might involve picking up litter around the neighborhood and weeding an elderly person's driveway before transitioning into a game of volleyball.

I'd strongly recommend not hosting a party to weed your own driveway or anything else that directly benefits you.

Keep the focus on having a good time with good friends while accomplishing something meaningful for someone else — and don't skimp on the snacks.

HEALTHY SNACK #8



MAKE SOMEONE'S DAY

Your kids might be surprised just how easy it is to make someone's day.

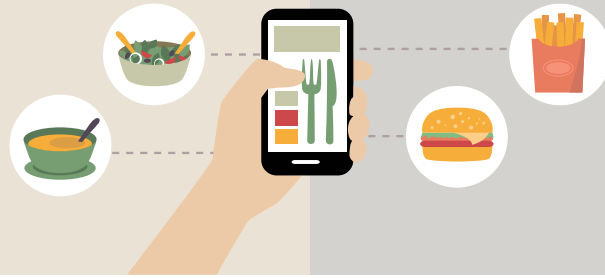
They might try writing short notes expressing gratitude to people who have impacted their lives (e.g. teachers, pastors, coaches, grandparents, friends, etc.) or an encouraging email to someone who's going through a hard time.

These small acts of kindness can make a huge difference.

Over the years my children have had a blast re-creating some of their fondest childhood memories for their younger siblings and/or the neighborhood kids.

This might look like a giant treasure hunt complete with hidden clues and buried treasure at the end, mattress surfing down the stairs (making sure there's plenty of padding everywhere), or huge games of hot lava monster outside.

Your son or daughter might find that just watching others enjoy something is as enjoyable as doing it yourself.



HUNGER IS THE BEST SAUCE.

Remember, these activities are designed to appeal to a hungry mind, not one that is constantly snacking on mental junk food.

If your son is constantly on his phone, on the computer, watching television, and playing video games, none of these “healthy snacks” will generate interest.

But as you cut back on mental junk food and let his mind start getting hungry, you’ll see him grow more receptive. Hunger, after all, is the best sauce.

Technology overload can be reversed.

But it takes following both of these steps:

1. *Remove distractions.*
2. *Provide exciting alternatives.*

Even if you’ve failed in the past — give this combination a try. Consider doing a technology fast as a family, let your kids build up a healthy mental appetite, and then step in with some healthy (and fun) alternatives.

I’d love to hear how it goes.

You can contact me through my son, Brett:

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SUGGESTED RESOURCE

GIVE YOUR KIDS A “BOOST” OF MOTIVATION.

Cutting back on technology is hard, so consider sharing our [Do Hard Things Videos](#) with your kids first. My twin sons, Alex and Brett, will challenge your tweens and teens to rebel against low expectations and do hard things for the glory of God.



Visit our website for all the details:

<https://www.dohardthings.com/conference>