UNPLUGGING
How many hours a day do you spend in front of a screen? Think about it: this includes televisions, laptops, tablets, cell phones. Do you consider yourself on par with the average student? A 2009 study of over 3 million college students found that your peers are spending an average of 12 hours each day engaged with some type of media. The majority of that time—9.5 hours—spent on computers, cell phones, gaming devices and mp3 players.

As students, you rely on some of these devices just to get through your day-to-day. But how long do you think you could spend away from these gadgets? 30 minutes? An hour? Could you do a whole day? That’s the concept of unplugging. Taking time out of each day to do something, just for you, that doesn’t involve any sort of screen or electronic.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH YOUR 30 MINUTES UNPLUGGED?
Here are some suggestions:
- Go for a walk
- Meditate
- Build something
- Get coffee with a friend
- Go to the Z-center
- Take a nap
- Sit in the park
- Play a musical instrument
- Take a group exercise class
- Prepare a meal
- Write in your journal
- Play cards

REASONS TO UNPLUG:
Regardless of what you end up doing with your unplugged time, the documented benefits of taking this time for yourself are countless. In fact, you may be surprised at the variety of outcomes associated with unplugging from different devices. Here are just a few of the benefits you can expect:

1. **Be a better student.** In a recent experiment, where students were instructed to "unplug," participants reported feeling more productive, less distracted in regards to their schoolwork. Many students also report feeling closer to their peers (perhaps due to more face-face connection), and often even healthier. In the study, many students used their unplugged time walk to the grocery store or attend a club meeting.

2. **Decrease your risk of injuries and illness.** Simply sitting for prolonged periods of time can cause an array musculoskeletal problems and can even contribute to chronic disease, like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs) are the most common computer related issue. RSIs occur from repeated physical movements that damage tendon, nerves, muscles, and other soft body tissues around joints. Examples of RSIs include: carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, bursitis, myofascial pain

Tips For Preventing Computer Related Injuries
1. Sit at an adjustable desk specially designed for use with computers.
2. Have the computer monitor (screen) either at eye level or slightly lower.
3. Have your keyboard at a height that lets your elbows rest comfortably at your sides. Your forearms should be roughly parallel with the floor and level with the keyboard.
4. Adjust your chair so that your feet rest flat on the floor, or use a footstool.
5. Use an ergonomic chair, specially designed to help your spine hold its natural curve while sitting.
6. Use an ergonomic keyboard so that your hands and wrists are in a more natural position.
7. Take frequent, short breaks. Go for a walk, or do stretching exercises at your desk. Stand often.
syndrome, and many others. For students and office workers, these conditions are often caused by repeated movements like typing, mouse clicking, or texting, and are exacerbated by poor typing techniques and body positions that place unnecessary stress on the tendons and nerves in the hand, wrist, arms, shoulders and neck.

3. **Get more sleep.** Researchers at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute showed that exposure to blue wavelength of light from computers, tablets, and other screens significantly lowered levels of the hormone melatonin, which regulates our internal clocks and plays an important role in the sleep cycle. And researchers say melatonin suppression may not only cause sleep disturbances, but also raise the risk developing of obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases. Try to turn off your screens and unplug an hour before bedtime!

4. **Be happier.** There’s no doubt that the Internet, especially Web 2.0 tools, has done a lot to make our lives easier. But does all these tweeting, posting and texting make us happier? Research may suggest not. A 2011 review study showed that Internet use, especially social media, was positively correlated with depression in college students. A follow up study showed that on social media, people tend to publicize only happy or exciting moments, photos, and events in their lives, and leave out the rest. Friends and followers are therefore left with a skewed view of their friends’ lives and will often feel sad or dull by comparison. Sound familiar?

5. **Stress less.** Today, over one third of people (including young adults) feel overwhelmed by technology. In fact, technology is the leading cause of work-place stress, suggests research from Cambridge University. Researchers in the UK have documented hundreds of reports of anxiety caused by being constantly plugged in. Common stressors were unanswered e-mails, posts that do not enough “likes,” or “favorites,” and embarrassing photos. The anxiety that results from these things is being referred to as Social Media Anxiety Disorder, or SMAD.

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**TAKE THE MIT UNPLUGGED CHALLENGE**

Technology is an integral part of our lives. For the most part – that’s pretty cool! New advances in technology continue to improve our medicine, our safety and even our learning. But moderation is key to all aspects of wellness. Just as too much caffeine, food, and even exercise can be detrimental to your health – so can excessive screen time. Take the MIT UNPLUGGED Challenge:

- Unplug for 30 minutes each day for one week: March 1st – March 8th
- By March 10th, send an email to mitpe@mit.edu and let us know what you did with your time unplugged. Did you find yourself more productive? Healthier? More relaxed?
- Participants will be entered to win a prize from MIT PE!

BONUS CHALLENGE: Think you can manage 24 hours unplugged? The National Day of Unplugging is March 7-8 (sundown to sundown). Join hundreds in taking the unplugged challenge at www.nationaldayofunplugging.com.

**Mini Unplugs to Help You Find Balance**

1. Turn off your monitor screen when someone is talking to you.
2. During class or a meeting, turn all mobile devices FOF
3. Play “Mobile Stack” (all cellphones on the table, out of reach) during meal time.
4. Switch to “Airplane” or “Do Not Disturb” mode on your electronic devices during bedtime.
5. In a relationship? Turn off data when you are together

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**References:**
- [http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ppm/1/2/72/](http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ppm/1/2/72/)
- [http://unplugyourclass.org/](http://unplugyourclass.org/)