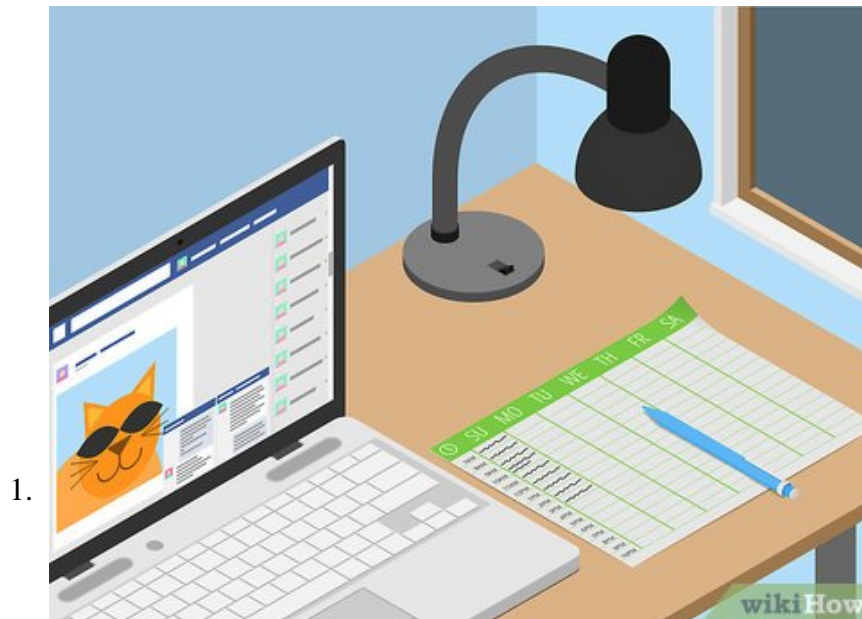


# How to Effectively Use Internet Time

The Internet is a tremendously useful tool, but can easily become a black hole for productivity. In today's world, many people need to use the Internet daily for work, school, or as a means of connecting with friends and family, but we...

Part 1 of 3:

## Becoming Aware of Your Existing Internet Habits



**Create an Internet activity log.** If you find yourself wondering 'Where does all the time go?', this is a great way to find out. For one week, write down everything you do while using the Internet. What websites you visit, how much time you spend on each, how often you refresh or update pages, each time you click on an embedded link, etc. Often our worst Internet time-wasting habits are things we do mindlessly.<sup>[1]</sup>

1. Make sure you include the time you spend using the network on your smart phone or other hand-held device. For people with on-the-go lifestyles, this is often where we clock in most of our Internet hours!

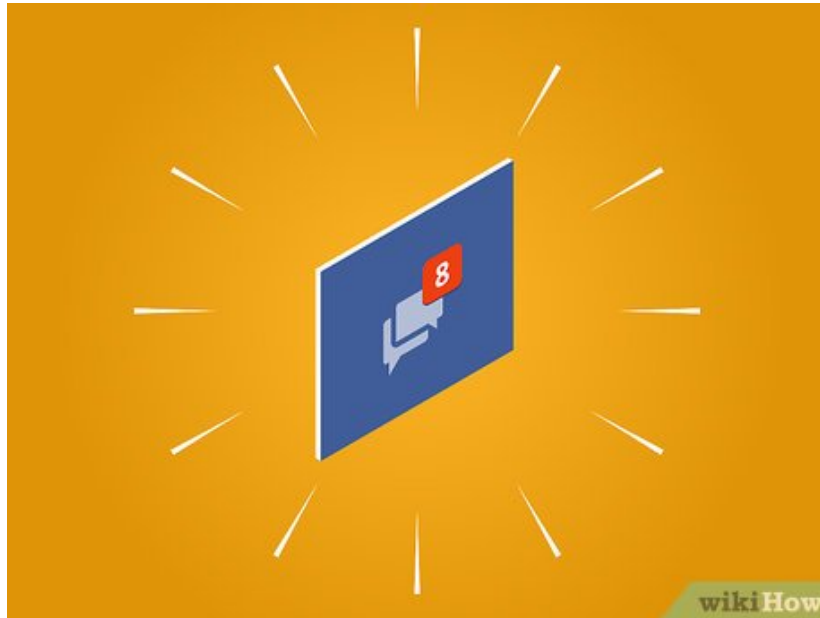
2.



**Identify your problem areas.** Checking our email or refreshing our Twitter feed every five minutes is an impulse that keeps us from being able to focus on longer tasks. If the paper we're researching begins to feel frustrating or boring, it seems harmless to take a 10-second break in order to see if something more exciting is going on in another window. The problem, though, is that all these little breaks, plus the time it takes us to refocus our attention as it shifts back and forth, really add up. Particular habits will vary from person to person, but some examples might include:

1. Do you check your email fifty times in a day?
2. Perhaps you spend an appalling amount of time on celebrity gossip blogs or websites?
3. Maybe you keep yourself logged in to Google Chat or Facebook Messenger when you're doing other things, and find you are frequently interrupted by friends looking to chat?
4. Or maybe you find that after thirty minutes of concentrating hard on something, you get a sudden intense 'craving' to see if anyone new has 'liked' your new Facebook profile picture, and then just get sucked into your newsfeed for an hour or more?
- 5.

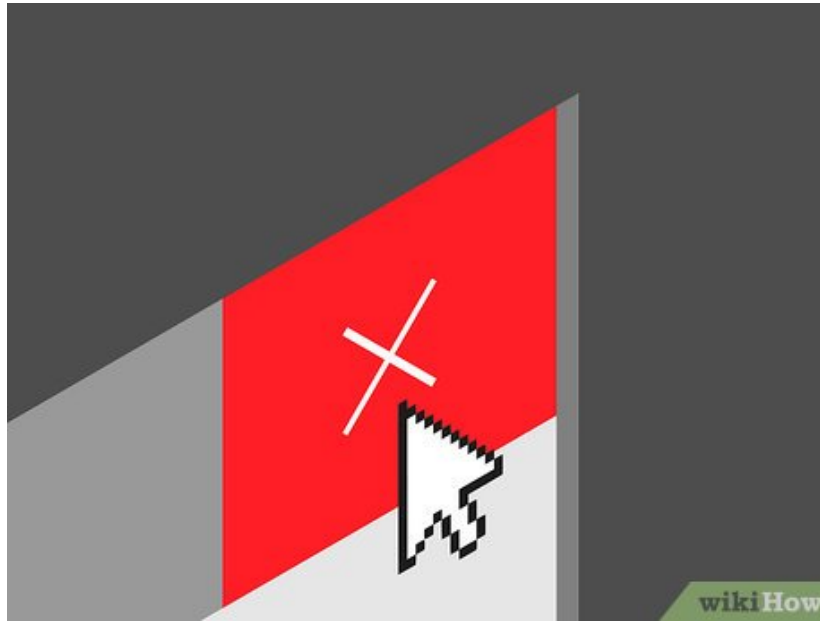
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**Get acquainted with your dopamine.** It might seem like your friend is being hyperbolic when she says something like 'I'm totally addicted to my iPhone!', but there's actual science behind this. Technology dependence actually changes the way our brains work, very similar to the changes a brain undergoes in the instance of drug, alcohol, or gambling addictions.

1. The culprit is a chemical in our brain called dopamine, which controls our moods, motivation, and sense of reward.
2. Every time you hear the bloop of your Facebook messenger, a little surge of dopamine is released in your brain, which is what triggers the urge to check it.
3. Dopamine addiction is an endless cycle. The brief 'high' is caused by the anticipation, the uncertainty of the unknown. Who could the message be from? Usually the urge to find out is greater than the satisfaction we feel once we've actually seen the message, which leaves us feeling a little low, and eager for another dopamine boost.
4. While technology dependence is becoming increasingly common in today's world, we don't *have* to be slaves to our dopamine receptors. With a little mindfulness and dedication, we can train ourselves to resist this eternally unsatisfying, unproductive loop. <sup>[2]</sup>

4.



**Resolve to make necessary changes.** For many people, unlearning pre-existing habits can be difficult, especially at first.

1. Recognize that most of these changes are going to require restricting yourself things that bring you comfort or pleasure.
2. It's not uncommon to even experience mild withdrawal symptoms when we begin to alter our Internet behaviors in this way, due to the decrease in dopamine production.
3. Keep in mind that this transitional discomfort is temporary, and that you are on your way to being a happier, healthier, and more productive person. [3]

Part 2 of 3:

## Getting Prepared

1.



**Organize your workstation.** It's amazing how much space we free up in our brains just by having a workspace free of visual distractions. If there's a pile of papers begging to be organized, or dirty dishes scattered around, it's going to be more difficult to focus on the task at hand. Try to keep your desk (or other work area) free of everything but current projects and whatever items you use every day.

2.



**Organize your computer desktop.** Make sure to keep your files organized into folders, rather than splattered all over your screen, and bookmark websites you use frequently. This will save you a lot of time when it comes to searching for things you need, and will keep you from being distracted by something that catches your eye in the searching process.

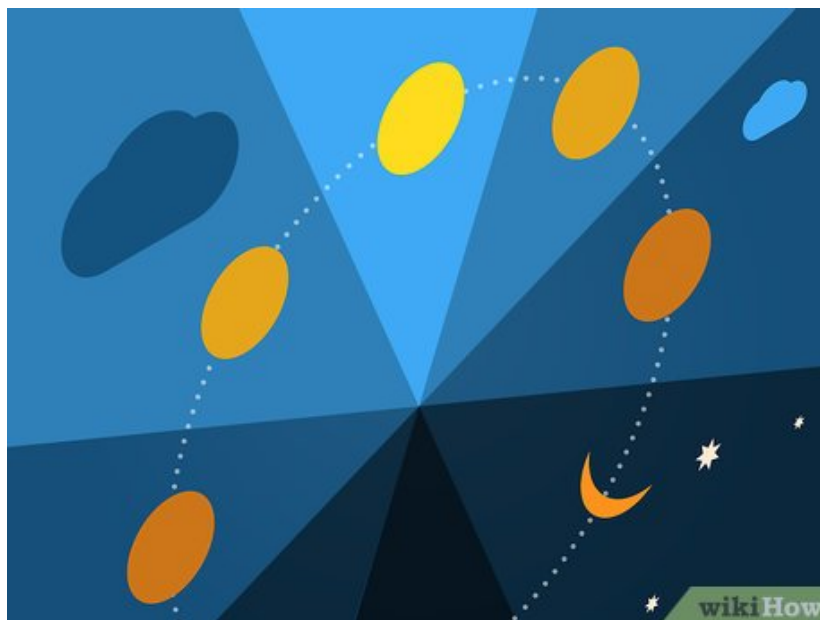
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**Make a list of what you need to do on the Internet before you open your browser.** Is there a song you've been meaning to listen to? Do you need to read some restaurant reviews to figure out where to bring your mom for her birthday? Do you need to need to research costs for a home-improvement project?

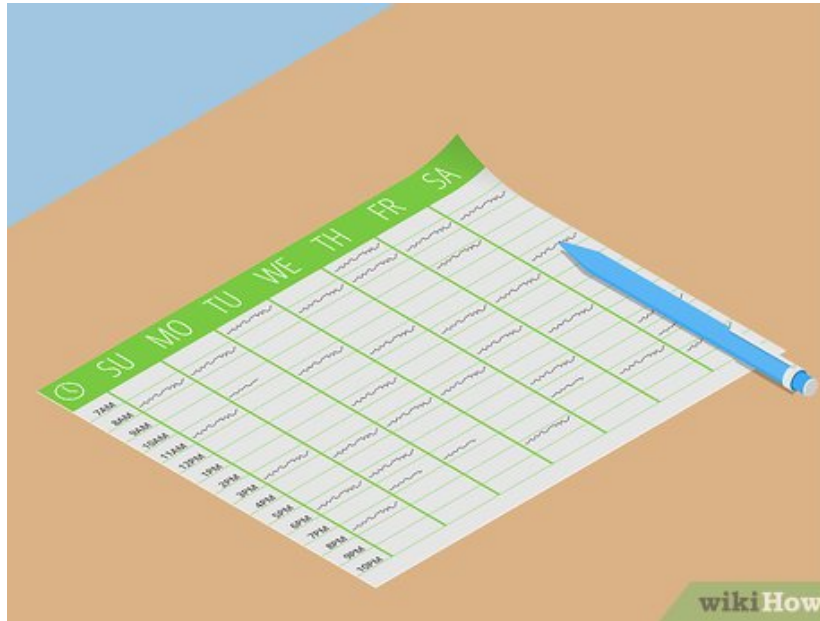
1. This is something you should be doing throughout the day, every day, as things pop into your head.
2. Keeping an Internet to-do list will give you a clearer sense of purpose, and remind you of your long-term time-management goals.

4.



**Determine what time of day you are most productive.** Some people are most alert first thing in the morning, others don't reach their peak until the middle of the night. If you have some flexibility in your daily schedule, try to plan your Internet time for when you are most likely to be awake, energized, and thinking clearly.

5.



**Plan to do more with less.** Internet efficacy is going to mean something different to everyone, depending on career, interests, and other lifestyle factors. Some people need to be logged on all day long for their jobs, while others primarily use the Internet in the evenings as a way to unwind.

1. While the specific time-management goals will vary from person to person, everyone should be aiming to simultaneously accomplish more while also spending less time online.

Part 3 of 3:

## Implementing Changes

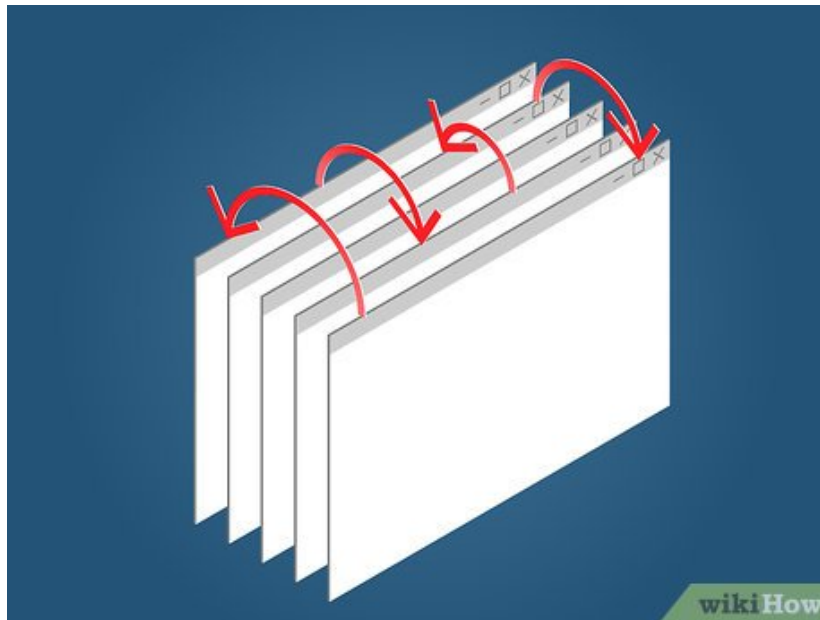
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**Minimize your screen time.** In other words, simply aiming to spend less time on the Internet in general is a good start. While it may seem counter-intuitive, we tend to be more productive when we have a shorter

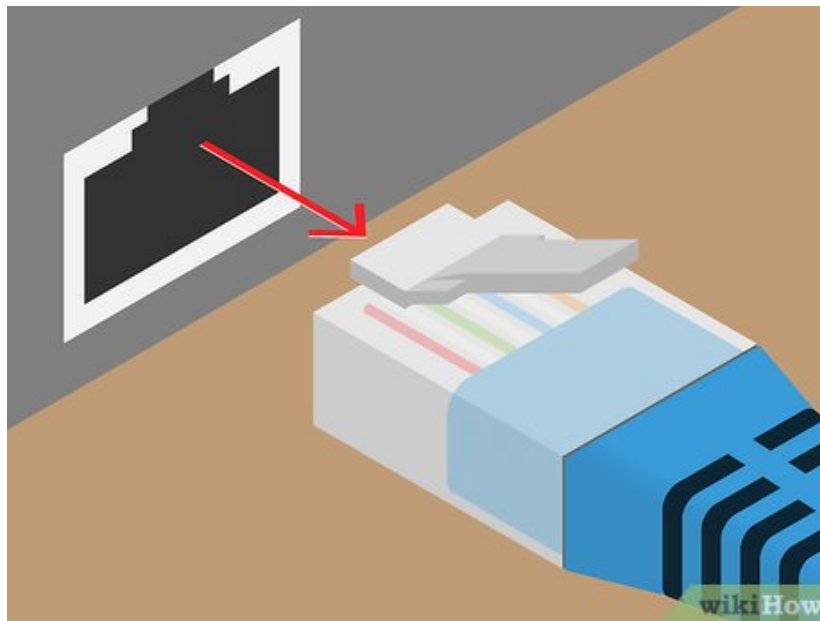
window in which to get something done.

2.



**Avoid multitasking.** While it might seem like it's more productive to do two or three things at once, it can actually slow us down in the long run, as we're not able to give our full attention to any one thing. It might be tempting to switch back and forth between Internet tasks in order to keep things interesting, but try to stick to your Internet to do list, finishing each thing before you move on to the next.

3.



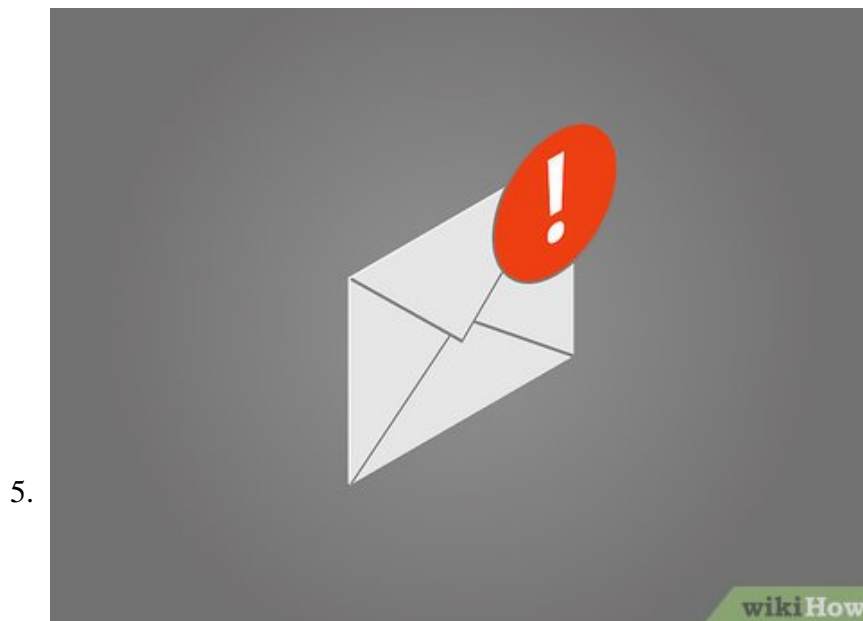
**Do what you can while offline.** If you need to read something longer than a page, such as an article or proposal, see if you can download it, and read it with your browser closed. If you need to write a long email reply, try composing it in Microsoft Word.

1. This will further minimize distractions, by preventing you from going down hyperlink rabbit holes, or protecting you from the bleeps or dings of email notifications as they inevitably trickle in.



**Restrict the time you spend on social networking websites.** This is something you're going to want to be tough with yourself about, as these websites are not only black holes for productivity, but also very addictive.

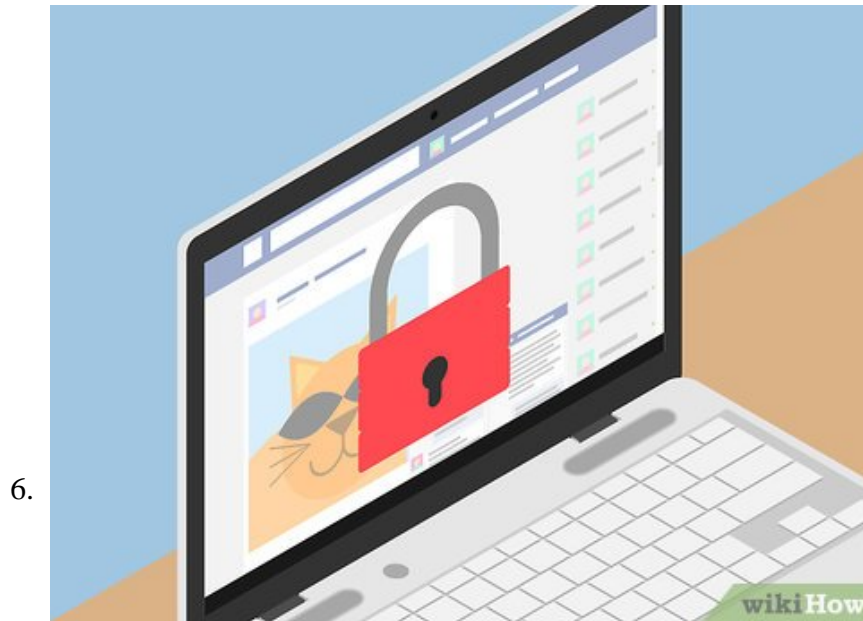
1. If you remember, dopamine thrives on anticipation and the unknown, and social networking sites are never static, always changing as people update their statuses, add photos, 'like' things. And nothing is actually ever as interesting or fulfilling as we think it might be.
2. If you must visit sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc., do so with great awareness, and give yourself a strict time limit. Try using a kitchen timer to keep yourself on track.
3. It's important to actually *sign off* of and close these websites, rather than just opening a new tab or window on top of them. The easier something is to access, the more tempting it is.



**Reckon with your email.** Try checking your email just three times daily: once in the morning, once around lunch time, and once in the evening. Your email, while necessary, can be as bad for time-

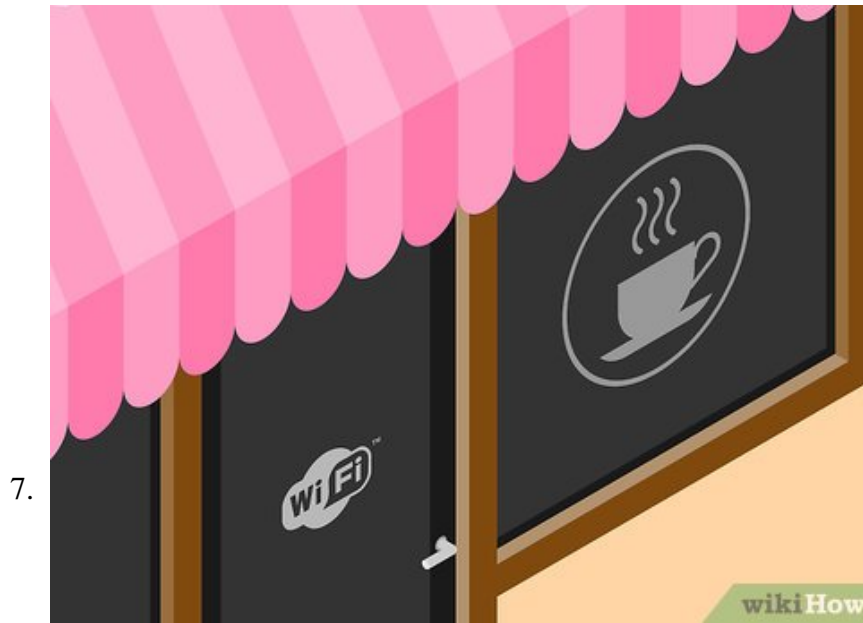
management as social networking sites if you are constantly refreshing or checking it incessantly.

1. Make sure to trash, archive, or respond to every new email in each sitting. This will not only save you time in the long run, but will give you a sense of accomplishment as you stay on top of your correspondences.



**Look outside of yourself for help with self-control.** If you are having trouble abiding by the restrictions you've set for yourself, you're not the only one! A majority of people find it challenging to efficiently managing their Internet time. So many people, in fact, there are a bunch of free or cheap downloadable applications out there to help you with just this. Here are just a few examples:

1. RescueTime keeps you from being able to access certain websites for a certain amount of time. Let's say you're working on a paper about different types of cloud formations; you'll be able to access Google, and the National Weather Service website that it directs you to, but you can block Gmail, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, BuzzFeed, or any other website that might tempt you to lose your focus. It also keeps track of your daily Internet habits for you, letting you know how much time you spend on email, on Skype, on wikiHow, etc. There are many other Internet-blocking applications available, all with slightly different parameters or additional features. Find one that works well for you!
2. The Email Game turns plowing through your email into a timed game. You earn points the faster you can clear your inbox!
3. Pocket allows you to save websites you come across for viewing at a more convenient time. Maybe you're reading an article that includes an enticing hyperlinked article. You can save this link, or anything else, to look at later.
4. focus@will is an application that uses brain science and soothing music to help increase your attention span and productivity, which will decrease the impulse to seek easy distractions. [4]



**Consider getting rid of your Internet at home.** While this might seem like an extreme measure for some, it will absolutely force you to plan out the majority of your Internet usage, inherently making more productive use of your Internet time. If you're struggling a lot with self-control, this might be something to look into. [5]

1. Having to use the Internet with other people around also has the potential to make you more aware of your bad habits. You'll be less likely to unconsciously browse your way over to your recent ex-boyfriend's Facebook page if you're sitting in the window of a café where anyone who walks past can see your laptop screen, for instance.
2. If you want to experiment with this idea but aren't ready to make the full-blown commitment of canceling your internet service, try stashing your router at a friend's house for a few days.
3. Or if you live with a roommate or spouse who's not amenable to the idea of going Internet-free, have them change wifi password.

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