Smartphone Wellness

Idea In Short

Use the phone you already carry for five specific jobs: a deliberate break, steady movement, a better bedtime, calls with people who matter and organized health records. Start with sleep, because it takes two minutes: schedule Do Not Disturb and a bedtime reminder tonight, and turn off screens at least 30 minutes before you sleep, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] suggest. Then set a weekly activity target against the World Health Organization [WHO] guideline of 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity. Treat gambling-style games with extra care, and check a health app's privacy policy before you enter personal data. Before each session, ask whether the phone is helping you feel better or you are scrolling out of habit.

Your smartphone probably gets more attention than almost anything else you own. From the moment your alarm rings until you settle into bed, it's often within reach. Yet with so much discussion about screen time and digital distractions, it's easy to overlook how useful this little device can be for your well-being.

Beyond keeping you connected and entertained, your smartphone offers features that can support healthier habits and make everyday routines more manageable. The key lies in recognizing these possibilities and using them in ways that complement your lifestyle.

So, how exactly can this familiar device contribute to a healthier, more balanced life? The five areas below cover entertainment, physical activity, sleep, relationships and health management, each with something you might not have considered.

Enjoy entertainment that helps you unwind

After a demanding day, sometimes all you want is a little break. Your smartphone makes it easy to enjoy recreational activities that could help lower stress without having to plan an elaborate outing or leave the comfort of home.

Mobile gaming, in particular, can offer a quick mental break from everyday pressures. For instance, if you're interested in casino-style online entertainment, you might explore platforms like Solaire. These websites offer a way to play JILI games and other popular titles that advertise vibrant graphics and varied themes for an engaging casual gaming experience.

Gambling-style games deserve a caveat. A 2022 study of adolescents found that those who played and spent money on simulated gambling games, such as slot machines played for points rather than money, were more likely to take part in monetary gambling and reported more symptoms of problem gambling.1 The study was cross-sectional, so it cannot show that the games cause the problems, and it covered young people, not adults. It does suggest a practical habit:

> decide on a time limit before you open the app, and treat any money you spend as an entertainment cost, not as a way to relax

You can also use your phone to listen to a favorite playlist or stream an audiobook while relaxing. Choosing intentional, lighthearted entertainment allows you to enjoy screen time on your own terms while maintaining a healthy daily balance.

Make physical activity easier to maintain

Ever promised yourself you'd exercise more, only to lose motivation after a few days? Building a consistent fitness routine can be challenging, especially when work and personal commitments compete for your attention.

Fortunately, your smartphone can make staying active feel more manageable. With fitness apps, you can monitor your daily steps, follow guided workouts or set movement reminders that fit your schedule. You don't necessarily need expensive equipment or a gym membership to get started, either. Even regularly following a brief stretching video streamed on your phone can help boost your daily energy and physical well-being.

A target gives those numbers meaning. The World Health Organization [WHO] recommends

at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week for adults, or the equivalent in vigorous activity.2 That works out to roughly 21 to 43 minutes a day. The 2020 guidelines also dropped the earlier requirement that activity come in bouts of at least 10 minutes, so a five-minute stretching video or a reminder to walk after lunch can add to the weekly total.

What's more, tracking your activity over time can reveal progress you might otherwise overlook. Seeing your walking distance gradually increase, for example, can motivate you to keep going one day at a time. With a little help from your smartphone, you can find enjoyable ways to move your body and make those activities a natural part of your lifestyle.

Build better sleep habits with simple digital tools

A restful night's sleep can make a noticeable difference in how you feel the following day. Yet when you're caught up in late-night scrolling, getting enough rest can become more difficult than expected.

Rather than letting your smartphone keep you awake, why not use its built-in features to support a healthier bedtime routine? Many devices offer bedtime reminders and scheduled notification settings that help reduce interruptions as you wind down. You can also explore relaxation apps featuring calming sounds or guided breathing exercises, particularly if you find it difficult to settle down after a busy day. Some smartphones even provide sleep-tracking features that estimate how long you've slept.

Although these tools aren't substitutes for professional medical advice, they may help you become more aware of your nighttime habits.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] list 7 or more hours of sleep per day for adults aged 18 to 60, and they recommend turning off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.3 A scheduled "Do Not Disturb" window that starts 30 minutes before your target bedtime puts that advice on autopilot, because the phone stops sending notifications without any decision from you.

Try setting a consistent bedtime reminder, scheduling "Do Not Disturb" and activating your phone's sleep mode once you're ready to sleep. When you let your device work quietly in the background, you can create a more relaxing environment that supports a good night's

rest.

Stay connected to people who matter

Think about the last time an unexpected message from a friend made you smile. Perhaps it was a quick greeting or a thoughtful check-in that brightened an otherwise ordinary day. Small interactions like these can help nurture meaningful relationships, which play an important role in emotional well-being.

With your smartphone, staying in touch becomes easier even when distance or busy schedules make in-person conversations difficult. Messaging apps and video calls allow you to catch up with loved ones, share everyday experiences and maintain connections despite physical separation.

The health case for doing so is documented. The 2023 advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General reports that loneliness and social isolation are associated with a 26% and a 29% higher risk of premature death, respectively.4 A message that takes 30 seconds to send is a small action against a measurable risk.

That said, meaningful communication isn't necessarily about exchanging messages throughout the day. Sometimes, a short yet thoughtful conversation can feel more rewarding than hours of distracted online interaction.

Consider calling someone you've been meaning to catch up with. Give the conversation your full attention, ask how they're doing and take time to listen. You might be surprised how a good conversation can leave you feeling happier and less stressed.

Take a more active role in managing your health

Keeping track of your health can feel overwhelming, especially when you're balancing appointments and medical instructions. Thankfully, your smartphone can help you stay organized and take a more proactive approach to your well-being.

For example, medication reminder apps can notify you when it's time to take prescribed treatments, while digital calendars help you keep track of upcoming medical appointments. You can also use your phone to jot down symptoms, prepare questions before doctor visits

or access secure patient portals to retrieve test results and communicate with medical professionals. With this information readily available, it's easier to stay informed and involved in your care.

Of course, it's important to choose reputable health apps and review their privacy policies before sharing personal data. In 2021 the Federal Trade Commission [FTC] issued a policy statement that health apps and connected devices collecting consumers' health information must comply with its Health Breach Notification Rule, which requires them to notify consumers when that data is breached or disclosed without authorization.5 When you compare apps, look for a clear statement of what data the app collects and whom it shares that data with.

With the right digital tools at your fingertips, taking charge of your health can feel much less complicated.

- 1Adolescents who play and spend money in simulated gambling games are at heightened risk of gambling problems
- 2WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour: at a glance
- 3About sleep
- 4Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation
- 5FTC warns health apps and connected device companies to comply with Health Breach Notification Rule

Summary

Your smartphone doesn't automatically improve your well-being simply because it offers helpful features. Its value depends on the choices you make and the boundaries you establish around its use. So, the next time you reach for your phone, ask yourself one question: Is what I'm about to do helping me feel better or am I just scrolling out of habit? That simple check-in can help you build a healthier, more intentional relationship with your device. Pick one of the five areas, such as a bedtime reminder or a weekly step goal, and set it up today, so the habit starts before the next scrolling session does.