

Social Fasting: A Mind-Focusing Productivity Cleanse

Having a very community-focused job and life means that I (and many others we know) spend a lot of time staying “connected” to our peers through social media. I’m a big fan of the power of social media as well as an opponent to it in certain ways. My personal social habits include the use of LinkedIn for professional posting (mostly auto-posts that come from my blog and other platforms) and Twitter for my more interactive social engagement. I stopped Facebook usage well over a decade ago for a variety of reasons and my personal social circles continued on quite fine without it.

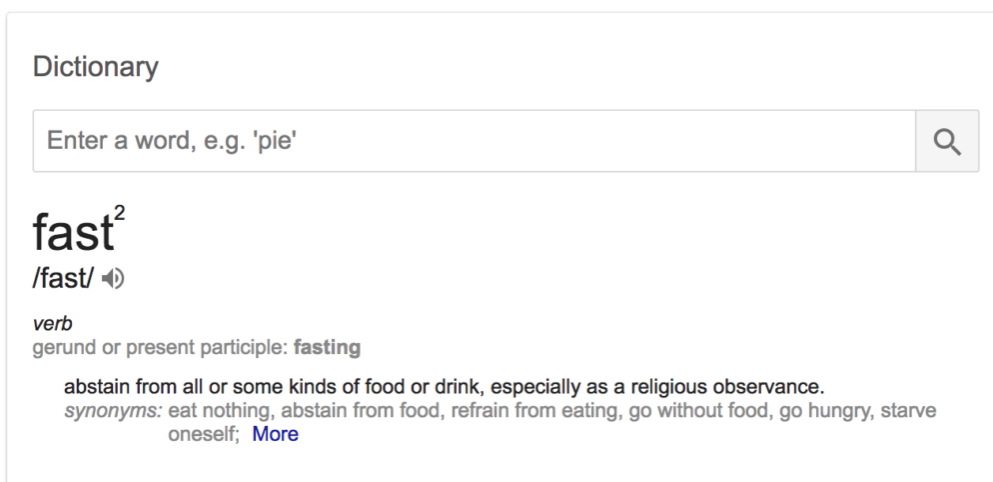
Social Overload - Understanding the Impact

A great [post was shared by Ethan Banks](#) on the challenges of productivity and getting distracted by online engagement and various rabbit holes of things like meme searching and such. A big thanks to Ethan for sharing his personal story goes along with my own experience of using the [StayFocusd](#) plugin for Chrome which is set to have Twitter and some other sites locked down to 15 minutes per day.

What that did for me was to ensure that I use these sites for very specific tasks and keep the focus tighter when I’m using them so that I don’t find myself spending too much time off-topic and cutting into productivity.

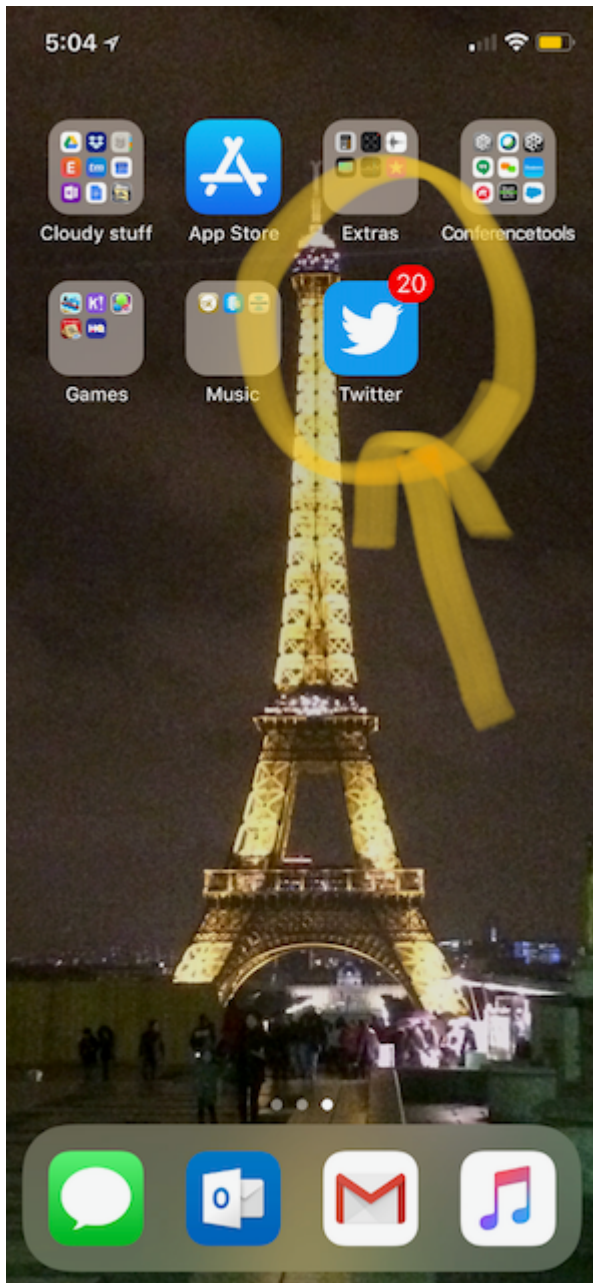
Social Fasting - Cleansing as a Life Hack for Productivity

Intermittent fasting is one of the most effective weight loss and diet management plans out there. That’s just a fact, and one that I subscribe to as a successful way to keep my body fat and energy levels as close to ideal as I can. Then it hit me....why don’t I do the same thing for



We are gripped by the need for dopamine (no, seriously this is a synaptic response when we engage through social media) and one of the biggest challenges you’ll face is the “I have a notification, so I have to check it” habit.

This is the screenshot from a couple of days ago when I began my latest social fast:



My Social Fasting Routine

It's pretty simple. I just cold turkey style for chunks of days. I began with not checking Twitter for a few hours, but then found that I got back on and kept re-checking and refreshing the timeline for a while.

Every week or so, I drop off of Twitter usage for 1-3 days. My postings are done using other tools (blog auto-posts, PostBeyond, Buffer) so that I keep other outbound social media content moving, but I just don't interact with Twitter for those social fasting periods. Once I got used to doing this on-demand, it made me think more about how to better use the platforms in a more productive way.

My recommendation is to give it a try by not going on social until part way through the day. Put aside the urge to wake up and grab your phone to check your social media. It will help your life (and potentially your relationships) by giving you the focus to really stop and think about what's on the todo list for the day/week and letting you stay more focused and productive with the continued habit.

The Down Side of No Social - Missed Messages (legit ones)

My Direct Messages on Twitter are a genuine contact method for many people. You may find the same thing as you take your social fasting. There are other options such as setting up notifications via IFTTT to let you know if you have a DM. Personally, I just make sure that people know how to reach me via email and for some, direct text message.

If you do heavily use DMs as a contact method, you may even setup a Twitter client (e.g. TweetDeck) and only allow your DM column. Set your times in the day or week when you allow yourself time to open it. Use calendar notifications to force the habit of opening and closing. We do love our dopamine hits of taking in notifications and refreshing the timeline, so we need those little hardened reminders as a helper sometimes. Nothing wrong with that. You're fighting human instinct and psychology on this stuff, and creating (or breaking) habits takes work and routines.

Escaping the Grip of FOMO

But...but...but...FOMO, and how do I keep up with news?! Great question. First is the FOMO challenge (Fear of Missing Out). If you take time away from social media, it feels like you've left the conversation, but the reality is that you need to and the world keeps on spinning just the same way it did before. Getting caught up is never an issue once you learn to take breaks. If you had a situation where you had 3 events to attend the same day, would the 2 events you can't go to suddenly leave you far behind in your learning? Probably not. If you are the type of person to sign up for so many things, you're probably a pretty aggressive learner already and the catch up is easier in many cases because you are more focused on what you want to get out of it.

The second bit is the "what if something happens in the world that I miss out on?" which (spoiler alert) is as much fake news as any of the content we read ☐. If any serious event takes place, you will find out about it through any of a dozen other means. It's not that you are shutting your eyes and ears and denying the world is spinning around you. It's that you are just stepping back from the real-time immediacy for a bit. We used to live this way quite well prior to the advent of social media.

Taking a social fast will have you rethinking how to better use your access to these networks hopefully. Feel free to reach out to me on tips and tricks with social fasting and how it has begun helping me both personally and professionally with productivity and mood.