

E-MAIL DETOX WILL A SLIMMING REGIME FOR YOUR BULGING INBOX TAKE A LOAD OFF YOUR MIND? **LISA SCOTT** FINDS OUT

Delete this mailbox madness



METRO IS PUT TO THE TEST

If you're particularly busy, Dr Seeley suggests a two- to four-hour break from your inbox (anything longer may make you more stressed). We put it to the test at Metro...

James Ellis, Travel Editor:

After an hour, I felt more stressed by not having access to e-mail. What if a story was breaking and I missed it? And just how many e-mails would I have to answer when the four-hour period was up? If you remain disciplined, you can keep your e-mail on and just not answer anything.

Lisa Scott, Health Editor:

The day before my switch-off, I felt panicky about going without my e-mail but I was surprised at how much work I got done in that time. I did look forward to turning it back on, though, to see if I had missed anything interesting – sad, I know.

Kieran Meeke, Features Editor:

Not having to deal with incoming ones made a real difference to the amount of work I could do. I was able to concentrate on finishing one thing, rather than being pulled back and forth by a number of issues.

The most miserable month of the year is almost over and it's pretty likely your resolutions are a distant memory. It's not too late to get back on the wagon – but instead of cutting out chocolate, why not reduce your information intake?

E-mails and phone calls are said to be making us ill because they take up so much of our time. Such are the pressures of day-to-day life that Nobel prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman has found enjoyable activities – such as spending time with your children – are widely regarded as mere distractions. We're often overloaded with useless information and it's making us stressed and miserable.

Seton Notes, a company that helps workers cope with e-mail management, believes the inbox is the biggest time waster at work.

Spam filtered

Staff spend up to 25 per cent of their time managing e-mail – and most of that is spent looking for lost e-mails or reading spam. A study by the University of the West of Scotland found that some workers check their messages up to 40 times a minute and, as a result, feel stressed, tired and unproductive.

Timothy Ferriss, author of New York Times bestseller *The 4-Hour Workweek*, checks his e-mail only twice a day. He also went on a one-

week inbox fast. 'Following a low-information diet was one of the best things I've ever done for my health and it's easily tripled my work performance,' he says.

'Once you stop drinking from the fire hose and can focus on output, the world changes. There's no more anxiety or the pressure to "keep up" or get left behind. Most information is irrelevant. Taking a short break from it makes you realise it has no positive effect on your life.'

The thought of avoiding your inbox for a week might make you reach for the fags, but there are ways to manage your e-mail stress.

Dr Monica Seeley of Mesmo Consultancy, a company that runs

workshops on how to manage e-mail, says your first step to a lighter media diet is to turn off your instant messaging system.

Ignore completely

'Alerts that tell us we have a new e-mail are disrupting our workflow. As a rule, ignore e-mails completely in the afternoon and when you do set aside time to read them, deal with them then – if you don't need them, delete them,' she says.

'Remember, you're responsible for the volume you receive and a lot of e-mails may be generated by you. Pick up the phone whenever you can.' Dr Seeley also suggests

declaring 'e-mail bankruptcy' if you've been out of the office for more than a few days. 'When you come back, instead of reading every e-mail, delete them all and send one out to your contacts saying: "If it is important, please resend",' she says.

Some companies have opted to make Friday an e-mail-free zone. Having this before the weekend brings e-mail use down for the whole of the following week. 'Doing all of this will make you much happier,' says Dr Seeley. 'Managing stress is about controlling the things we can and looking at ways to influence the things we can't.'

■ www.mesmo.co.uk

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