

Domino's Slice of Home Life Report



Behavioural Psychologist, Jo Hemmings' Commentary on the Report

Even though we are spending increased amounts of time at home, the demands on our available time for work, chores, activities, social media and commitments to friends and family have led to ever more blurred boundaries between uptime and downtime, meaning we are pushed into having to create valuable opportunities for genuine rest and relaxation.

In turn, this drive to create downtime has led to a shift in the pattern – or rhythm – of our week as we take the necessary steps to ensure that we have enough real downtime in our busy lives.

New Rhythm of the Week

As we try and pack more and more activities into our daily lives, most of us are also aware of the important restorative nature of genuine relaxation, so a natural shift has emerged in the way that we manage our time.

This is due to a combination of a number of factors. While we still have household chores to do like shopping, cooking and cleaning, we also have more activities that we want to include in our weekly schedules such as playing sport, going to the gym and using social media. Even watching TV has become more 'demanding' as we can series record all sorts of programmes we are interested in, but need to find the time to watch them all!

As smart phones have become more sophisticated and jobs more demanding, many of us find it hard to switch off from work when we get home. With email so easily to hand, this will eat away at our genuine downtime too.

With the advances in smart phone and tablet technology, there has also been a shift in expectations from employers and colleagues: because we *can* be available 24/7, we *will* be available. Our work lives are literally following us home at the end of the day, through our commute and on into our evenings and weekends. This used to be a time reserved for an occasional out of hours work task or to contact colleagues who may be in a different time zone. But now many of us are at the behest of a constant drip feed of emails, texts and calls at any time. This brings with it a sense of anxiety and urgency that makes many of us feel like a response simply can't wait until the next working day.

This 'work noise', intruding into our home lives, has a cumulative effect which can make it very difficult to switch off from our professional lives when we are trying to have downtime at home, which creates tension, stress and a real lack of quality time on our personal relationships.

Once this pattern of behaviour has established itself, it can be very hard to resist as the expectations – and our perception that we need to make ever more speedy responses – start to rise even further.

Catch-up TV

With series record, catch-up and on demand TV available around the clock, the temptation to watch everything that sounds interesting can just be too difficult to resist. While this is amazing in so many ways, we are in real danger of losing both sleep and other quality time with our families to the all-seeing eye in the corner of the living room.

With people binge-watching TV series on Netflix or catch-up TV and finding it hard to resist the cliff-hanger that lures us into the next episode, we can easily drift into 'catch-up obsession' where we find it increasingly hard to resist working our way through an entire series in one sitting. This actually over-stimulates our brains and makes it harder, rather than easier, to relax. While we are aware that children would limit their screen time for the same reasons, it is also important for adults to keep their minds refreshed for the next day. Try and remember that TV series are designed to get us hooked and keep us watching. Set yourself an episode quota and stick to it. When the countdown starts, make a conscious decision not to be lured in. You will not only feel stronger in yourself for resisting, you will feel more rested and less burnt out too.

It's not like you are actually going to miss out - most devices have a massive capacity to keep TV shows for a long time, so take the pressure off yourself to watch everything immediately and save them for that rainy day. Better still, schedule in a box-set weekend of back to back TV watching- it's what rainy weekends were made for.

Spending time with your partner watching TV

Snuggling up with a loved one and watching TV can be one of the greatest downtime experiences of them all. With so much choice, watching TV together can easily be a quality bonding experience. It's easy to find something you both enjoy, so switching on can be the ultimate 'switch-off' relaxation wise for many couples or families.

With weekends becoming more pressurised than ever, scheduling some mid-week downtime together as a couple is absolutely key to restoring our balance of work/activities and proper relaxation.

We need to make intimacy a priority in our lives and if we need to schedule time together – the date night principle – then we should consider it one of the most important and effective ways of keeping our relationship healthy and happy. Plenty of high-profile couples do this, including the Camerons, Obamas and Beckhams, as well as families who spend a lot of time apart. It seems to work for them and as our lives get busier and more disturbed by individual activities, it is something I recommend to a lot of my clients to recapture that important intimacy. It doesn't have to be an expensive night out – sharing a takeaway pizza at home can work just as well!

It may sound obvious, but if you are going to spend some time together, make sure you sit together! Because we often have a three-piece suite, it is easy for couples to have their own seats – one person on the sofa, while another is on the chair. There's plenty of room for both of you on that sofa and cosying up to watch TV together is a lovely bonus and the physical proximity of your loved one will boost your wellbeing!

Super Busy Saturday

Saturdays are becoming the busiest day of the week. Forget the idea of putting your feet up: many of us are trying to cram as many as 16 activities into the first day of the weekend. We need to ensure that with five days of work behind us, we try and schedule some quality downtime into our first day off of the week.

There is a huge temptation to pack as much as possible in on a Saturday – especially in terms of household chores, shopping and DIY, the tasks we can't manage to find time for during the week. But it can leave us feeling exhausted. And this, most commonly occurs in women.

So, to make sure that you have some energy left for Saturday night, my advice for women - especially mums - would be to resist the temptation to run after the children (and often your partner) tidying up after them as they go. It's not only exhausting, but also very frustrating. Get everyone to muck in and clear their own mess up and don't worry about everything looking pristine, especially at weekends. A bit of untidiness is fine – it's your family home not a show home!

Reading Returns

Reading, perhaps even more so than TV for many people, is the perfect escapism. We get to choose what we want to read, when we read it and also dictate our own pace of reading for maximum enjoyment. Many people associate reading books with holidays or long journeys, activities that afford us a lot of free time and where there are few other demands on us. This association with relaxation is one of the reasons why we yearn to be able to unwind with a book or a magazine. We also associate reading with childhood, when we were read a bedtime story to help us relax and go to sleep – just what's needed to unwind at the end of a busy day. It is one of the least intrusive and most rewarding downtime activities – and also very private to us of course, so giving us valuable alone time.

Technology Leaving us at risk of 'At Home Burn Out'

Many of us are almost on 24/7 'watch' on social media, text messages and emails. This not only deprives us of sleep, but also means that our brains never really get much of an opportunity to 'switch off', which can add to stress, anxiety and potentially burn-out.

The real answer here is to either discipline ourselves to turning off TVs, tablets and smartphones (not just to silent or vibrate mode) at an agreed time in the evening to allow our brains and minds to readjust into relaxation mode. Many experts would suggest that just as you shouldn't eat a meal within a couple of hours of going to sleep, for risk of indigestion, we should do the same with technology.

So if you want to be asleep by 11.00pm, and want to avoid brainoverload – or 'brain indigestion' - turns off that technology by 9.00pm.

Women and Texting someone in their own home

With one in three women admitting to texting someone in their own home at least once a day and being more likely to use Facebook and Snapchat to people that we live with, than men, what is happening to our communication behaviour?

This digital chatter with people we live with is a very bad communication habit to get into. It's the digital equivalent of shouting into another room to talk to your partner! Apart from the fact that it prohibits genuine face-to-face communication, it distracts the recipient from whatever they are doing and causes stress levels to rise.

But as a relationship counsellor, I know that loss of intimacy or quality time as a couple, is one of the biggest causes of relationship concerns. When one partner starts to feel neglected or sidelined, due to the busy lives of their partner, the dynamics of a balanced, relationship starts to alter and communication begins to break down, causing anything from quiet, brewing resentment to major arguments.

The Good Chatter Guide

Unless you live in a property the size of Buckingham Palace there is *never* an excuse to speak to someone you live with using your smartphone. Texts, Whatsapps, Facebook messages, Tweets, even SnapChats are increasingly replacing face-to-face conversations in the home, and this is having a detrimental impact on our ability to relax in the home.

So much of our lives, out of necessity, are spent digitally communicating with our eyes glued to a screen. Just as people who email their colleagues who are sitting in the same room, rather than wander over for a conversation, this is lazy communication behaviour and we're ultimately in real danger of losing the art of face-to-face conversation.

Sharing Chores/Glory Chores

In terms of divvying up household chores between men and women, we have moved a very long way in just a generation with more couples than ever dividing up household chores on a more equal footing.

However, during a long transitional period - like a 25-year generation - what tends to happen is that rather than an equal divide of all household chores, women adapt by giving the easier or more pleasurable chores to the men. It's effectively 'breaking them in' over a long period of time to getting used to taking on some of the household activities.

But because these household duties are more pleasurable or more fun, men become unwilling to relinquish the 'glory chores' like reading bedtime stories to the children or cooking the Sunday roast. While they might balance this by doing some of the 'dirtier' chores, like taking the bins out, they are still reluctant to take on everyday less glamorous duties like taking the children to school, cleaning or cooking mid-week meals.

If this has happened in your family, it's time to review the situation. Explaining to your partner that you would like to read the children a bedtime story a couple of times a week, while they take the children to school instead, for example, can help broker that change. Don't let anger and resentment build up, instead talk it over calmly and start introducing gentle change a few times a week, then upping it a little, until the division of labour becomes a more equal one.

Thursday is Find a Date Night

With Saturday nights generally being the preserve of long-term couples, rather than first or second dates, and Friday being an evening where many of us stay at home after the working week, it's perhaps no surprise that Thursday has become the new date night.

It has less pressure than a weekend night, even though the weekend is in sight and so also makes a good night to go searching for love. Men seem to be spending a lot more time looking

at girls on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, than vice versa. I suspect this is because women go directly to an online dating site or app, specifically designed to find a partner, rather than considering Facebook or Twitter as a finding-a-partner option, tending to use them more for general communication with friends.

We also see another spike in searching for a partner on a Sunday night, just before the working week starts and also the day that the research shows is most associated with friends and family, so the perfect evening to look for a new friend!

Jo Hemmings Tips

Top Ten Downtime Drainers and How to Avoid Them

- **Company technology** – with access to work emails/calls at any time of the day or night, it's easy to be available at all times. This sets up a vicious cycle that normalises working around the clock. Let your bosses know you are not accessible from a certain time and stick to it.
- **Scrolling syndrome** – give yourself a time limit when using social media to stay feeling in control. We all know that “ten minutes” on Instagram or Pinterest can lead to an entire lost evening. So what if you're not currently on a beach, life's too short to spend it vicariously experiencing other people's days!
- **Group chat sinkholes** – you turn away from your phone for one minute and are greeted with 74 messages about someone's new haircut. Your friends or colleagues will never know if you 'mute' a group chat on your phone, so try this on conversations that require a lot of attention.
- **Move away from the messages** – many of us never turn our phones off and it's hard to resist the tempting ping of a notification. The simplest way of avoiding this is to both turn your phone onto silent and charge it in another room – not your bedroom. If you can't hear or see your phone at night, a new and improved habit will form and you'll soon find that you get a better night's sleep.
- **No together time** – we all lead very busy lives and it's easy to spend more and more time apart, hurtling through our to-do lists. So dedicate an evening or two to doing something together- whether it's a friend, partner or family member, choose an exercise DVD, a new boxset, tackling a recipe book, anything- but make it yours.
- **The yes-man trap** – with increasing demands on our work and social lives, it can be difficult to say 'no' to colleagues and friends. Next time you feel like you just can't fit something in, say so and give a reason why. It can be liberating and highly effective.
- **Weekend to-do lists** – it's very easy to get into a pattern that leaves no room for leisure time, making reasons for why you always have something more important to do. Be kind to yourself and leave some breathing room to just put down the list and relax.
- **Sleeplessness** – lack of sleep hinders our ability to be productive or enjoy our downtime. Try to unwind in the evening and not look at blue screen technology (laptop, tablet,

phones) at least an hour before bed. Your mind and body will thank you for sleep's restorative powers.

- **The lost art of being lazy** – sometimes we are our own worst enemies when it comes to relaxation time. We lead such active lives that simply being idle for an evening or a weekend seems alien to us. Think like an athlete: they schedule in 'rest days'. I recommend you do the same. If it's good enough for Jessica Ennis-Hill...
- **There's an app for that** – spend a day logging how much time you spend on various apps. You may be surprised by the results- a daily 40 minute Solitaire session adds up to a lot of time over a month. Try deleting the biggest drainers and see what you can do with the time it frees up.

The Good Chatter Guide –

Here's my good chatter guide: how to keep having proper conversations at home and manage the impact of digital conversations on your downtime

- **Maximise your morning**- stop checking your phone first thing. Establish a routine that prioritises positive and constructive tasks first, such as wishing your family, partner or housemate a good morning, enjoying breakfast or doing some exercise. Only after you've done this, should you allow yourself to look at overnight emails and messages. It'll let you have some breathing space and stop you feeling like you're on-call from the second you wake up.
- **Stay in the present** – unless it's something urgent, don't let your digital communication interrupt face-to-face conversations. Think about how you feel when someone is clearly more interested in texting than hearing about your day. Be rigorous with yourself- if it means leaving your phone outside the room, then do that. In return, you'll have genuine, valuable conversations in real-time that ultimately count for more than a series of emojis!
- **Be vocal** about your new behaviour. Known for always being online? Tell everyone you're planning on changing and get them to support and encourage you. Often, when one person gets their phone out, it automatically means others do –a Mexican wave of dependency. Small changes such as telling friends and colleagues you won't be accessible from 9pm onwards means you can enjoy quality downtime with loved ones without feeling the need to check your tech.
- **Get an alarm** – if it will stop you bringing your phone into the bedroom. So many people use the alarm as an excuse to keep tapping away under the guise of "just checking". It'll also lessen the chances of looking at your phone in the middle of the night, which exposes you to blue screens and can lead to sleeplessness.
- **The golden rule** – never, ever text someone you live with. If a door is closed, you're feeling extra comfy on the sofa, or just a little lazy, it can be very tempting to text instead of talk to the people you live with. No excuses- this habit stops now. Face-to-

face interaction is proven to have a huge benefit to our sense of belonging and wellbeing, and substituting this for technology can be damaging. Try it and see how you feel- it's amazing how much more value you get out of genuine conversations

At Home Burn-Out Quiz –

Are you at risk of at home burn out?

Take the quiz and find out!

The age-old saying goes, “if you want something done, ask a busy person”. A new report from futures agency Trajectory, in collaboration with Domino's Pizza, shows that people are leading busier lives than ever before: taking part in more activities and trying to fit more into their days and weeks. On average we are now trying to squeeze 13 at-home activities into our jammed schedules each day as we juggle family time, work commitments, life admin social and leisure activities.

This deregulation of life has resulted in consumers having more control over what they do, where and when. The impact of the deregulation of life is particularly visible at home, simply because it has meant that we are now able to spend so much time there.

However, this freedom to get more out of our lives at home can be enormously positive, but it has also had the impact of bringing time pressure into our home life and, with it, a growing need for consumers to differentiate between @home uptime and @home downtime in order to avoid a squeeze on genuine relaxation. When this differentiation doesn't happen, we run the risk of what the report identifies as 'at home burnout'.

So how do you make sure you've got a healthy downtime balance? Jo Hemmings, a celebrity and behavioural psychologist with 15 years' experience supporting people with their happiness and wellbeing, is here to help you recognise if you're in danger of suffering from 'at home burnout'.

Before going to bed, do you switch off all your digital gadgets?

- A) Yes, I turn them off at least an hour before bed
- B) Sometimes, it depends on who I'm speaking to and what's going on
- C) No, they're the last thing I see before I go to sleep

When you're at home, how often do you check your phone for new emails or messages?

- A) Once or twice in an evening
- B) Probably once every hour or so
- C) Every few minutes - it never leaves my side

Do you tend to work after hours?

- A) My colleagues know that once I've logged off, that's it until the morning
- B) If things are busy, I'll keep an eye on messages after work hours, but that's the exception rather than the rule
- C) I'm constantly online- I check my phone constantly and have burnt the midnight oil working on many occasions

What time to do usually get to bed if you've been home all evening?

- A) Early to bed, early to rise – I try and wind down quite early
- B) I try and stick to a regular bedtime although I occasionally stay up late working or with a film
- C) I regularly stay up late – either working late, doing chores or watching TV or a box set – often much later than planned

How do you approach your life admin (i.e. internet banking, tax forms)?

- A) I dedicate a specific amount of time to a task and make sure it's completed in that timeframe
- B) Thank goodness for banking apps- they allow me to do my life admin on the go. I'd be lost without them!
- C) I don't know where the time goes and am often doing my banking late into the night- I don't know how people have the time

When watching TV/ a film with a friend or partner do you:

- A) Sit back and relax, this is your time to enjoy each other's company
- B) Sometimes you multi-task: cook, write your to-do list for tomorrow, check what's happening on Twitter - but you mainly kick back
- C) You've been told you spend all your time on your phone/tablet/laptop but promise you're paying attention

When you're having a meal with someone at home, do you ever do other things?

- A) No, I just enjoy the food and company
- B) Sometimes I'll check my phone, but try to avoid it
- C) I often post on Instagram, check social media or emails

Do your friends and family ever complain about you checking your phone or a device – and not giving them your full attention?

- A) Never – I almost never check my phone or devices when I'm spending time with someone
- B) Occasionally – but I try and avoid being on a device with someone else present
- C) Often – my friends and family regularly complain that I'm distracted

Are your weekends or days off relaxing?

- A) I always find time to relax at weekends - it leaves me refreshed
- B) Sometimes a busy weekend means I start the week tired
- C) I have so much to do on my days off - I often find it less stressful to be at work

If you answered mostly As...

Your downtime sounds restorative and refreshing- you've achieved a great balance in your home life. Keep making time for yourself, friends and family.

If you answered mostly Bs...

Watch out, you might be at risk of burning yourself out. First you need to identify which areas of your downtime have stopped being genuinely relaxing.

If your relationship with a partner or friend is suffering from a lack of downtime, I suggest you schedule in a 'date night' and stick to it. As our lives are increasingly affected by an expectation of being constantly switched-on to social media, it's good to leave the gadgets somewhere else and just enjoy each other's company, be it ordering a takeaway, cooking a meal, or just watching some great TV.

If you answered mostly Cs...

With a jam packed schedule and an always-on routine, it sounds like you are at high risk of at-home burnout. With the world accessible from the comfort of our sofa, it's very hard to switch off and enjoy some restorative, genuine downtime.

I advise you reassess your routine and how it's making you feel, and try having periods away from your devices, emails and social chatter. If you set a precedent that you won't respond to friends or colleagues late at night, their behaviour will change accordingly.

For the next week, try logging off from emails, social media and gadgets by 9pm at the latest and see how it makes you feel.

