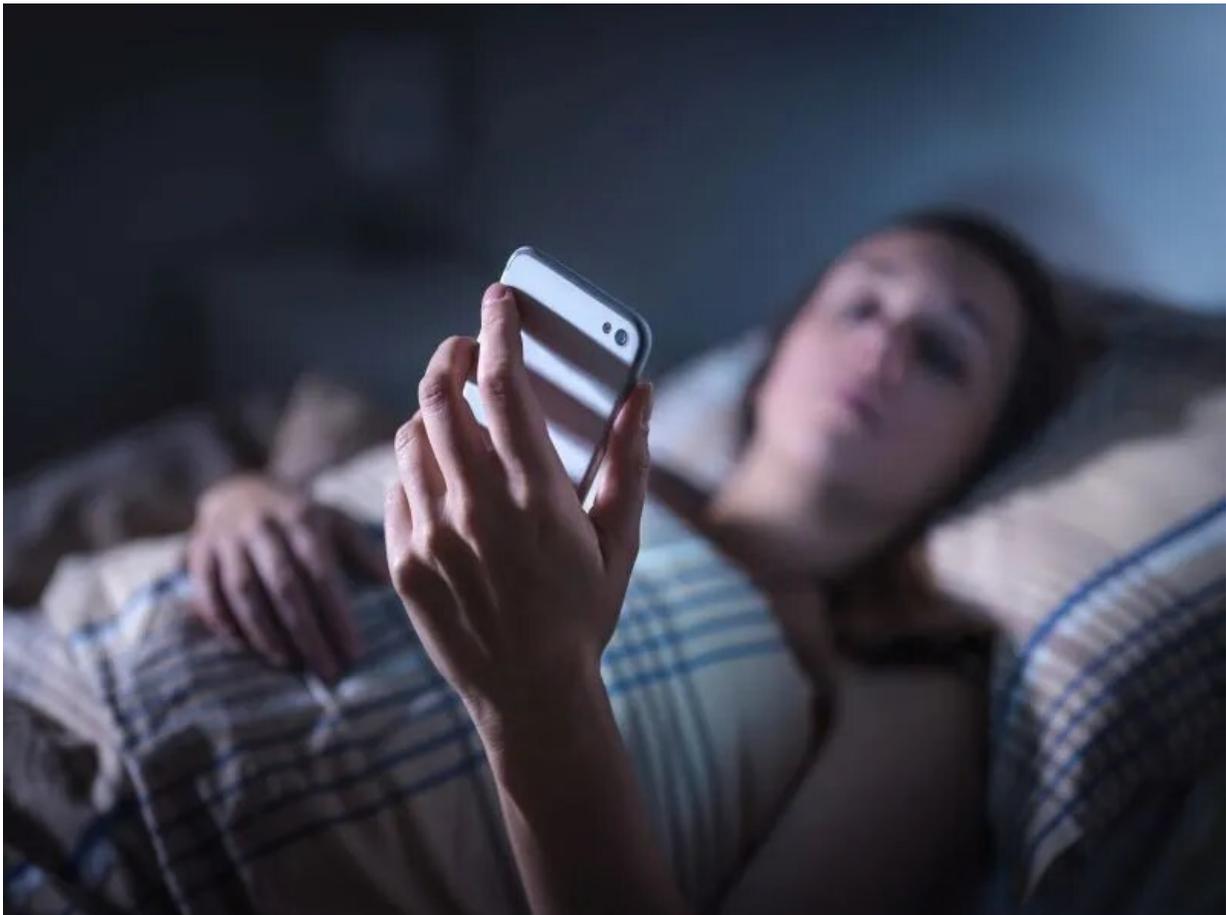


# Muting your phone may cause more stress, not less

June 27 2022, By Denise Mann HealthDay Reporter

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Are you plagued by FOMO—"fear of missing out"? Then silencing your

smartphone may not be the stress-buster you think it is.

That's the takeaway from a new study that found many folks check their phones a lot more when they're set to mute or vibrate than when they beep and ring.

"Without any clear 'buzz' or sound from their phones, individuals with high FOMO might use their phones even more," said study author Mengqi Liao, a doctoral candidate in communications studies at Penn State University.

For the study, 42% of 138 iPhone users chose vibration-only mode; 8.7% were on silent mode, and the rest kept their ringers on for four straight days. Before the start, people completed a survey to see if they had [FOMO](#), and they activated the Screen Time tool on their phones so they could report exact data to researchers.

Those who muted their phones clocked the highest time on [social media](#) and checked their phone more often than participants who didn't silence their device. Phone screen time was not only higher in those people with FOMO, but muting notifications also increased feelings of stress.

"Instead of muting or disabling all notifications from their phones to avoid distractions, users with high FOMO could customize their notifications setting and selectively disable some notifications," Liao suggested.

This may mean enabling notifications from close family and friends to alleviate the anxiety, she said.

"We hope our study could inspire more personalized design for notifications or better design for notifications that could improve users' experience of mobile phones, in addition to a simple do not disturb

function for everyone," Liao said.

The findings were recently published online in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*.

Two outside experts agreed that breaking up with your phone and overcoming FOMO will likely require more than silencing your device.

Therapists often tell people to [turn their phones off](#) so they can be more present in their day-to-day lives, but this study suggests that may not be the best course of action for some folks, said Thea Gallagher, a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at NYU Langone Health in New York City.

"The data is pointing to something different if you have FOMO: You will actually be compulsively checking your phone even more because you think you are missing notifications," she said.

Gallagher suggested taking a physical break from your [phone](#) and trying to get to the [root of your FOMO](#).

Lovern Moseley, a child and adolescent psychologist at Boston Medical Center, agreed.

"FOMO is more of an issue for [young patients](#), teens and youth, but a lot of us struggle with being tied to our phones and recognize the need to reduce the amount of time we are spending on them," said Moseley, who is also a clinical assistant professor at Boston University School of Medicine.

Smartphones are a double-edged sword, she said.

"They can be such a benefit in terms of having information at our

fingertips, but they can also be a downfall as we reduce social interactions since we are constantly on our phones," Moseley said.

It's not easy to break this habit, she added. Try to find a replacement behavior that is more fulfilling and accept that you may feel uncomfortable at first.

"This distress will go away at some point," Moseley added.

**More information:** The Anxiety and Depression Association of America offers tips on how to get over [FOMO](#). Mengqi Liao et al,

Sound of silence: Does Muting Notifications Reduce Phone Use?, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2022.107338](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107338)

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