

WELLNESS, DISCIPLINE & TECHNOLOGY

Owning the Data of the Self

A three-week study of food, sleep, movement, recovery, and the attention economy

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The numbers mattered, but not because they explained everything. They mattered because they revealed where my habits were quietly shaping the quality of my life.

Owning the Data of the Self

By William Wisniewski

This began as a simple wellness project: three weeks of measuring food intake, sleep, physical activity, sedentary behavior, and planned exercise intensity. The assignment was practical, but the insight became more personal than the data first suggested. I was not only observing whether I ate enough, slept enough, or trained hard enough. I was observing the relationship between my habits and my sense of command over myself.

The study showed me the obvious things first. I need calories to sustain my training. I need sleep to recover. I need rest days, even when my mind would rather keep moving. But the deeper insight came from a smaller pattern: the nights I used technology before bed were the nights my sleep became less disciplined. My phone did not merely take time. It pulled my mind into a state of comparison, ambition, distraction, and unfinished thought.

That was the most meaningful part of the study. Technology was not separate from wellness. It was directly tied to it. It affected when I fell asleep, how my mind settled, and how clearly I woke up. It also revealed a larger question: if I want to become someone capable of disciplined work, entrepreneurship, spiritual grounding, and real-world presence, then I cannot allow the easiest forms of comfort to govern the structure of my days.

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The Study

Over three weeks, from November 7, 2022, to November 27, 2022, I measured my food intake, sleep, physical activity, sedentary behavior, and the intensity of planned exercises. The goal was to understand my overall wellness through the basic evidence of daily life. I wanted to see what was working, what needed more attention, and what my routine was communicating back to me.

For the first two weeks, I was at Western Colorado University. I ate three meals a day, usually from The Rack, along with a calorie shake of roughly 1,250 calories. The meals were not always ideal, but they were available, fast, and consistent. I usually ate breakfast early, lunch around noon, and dinner around 5 p.m. That rhythm helped me maintain roughly 3,500 calories per day, which supported my training and allowed my body to operate at a healthier level.

The final week was different. I was home in Golden, Colorado, for Thanksgiving break, and on November 21, I came down with strep throat. The food tasted better at home, but it took more effort to prepare and cook meals. Because I was sick and not training, I stopped drinking my calorie shake and did not consistently eat three meals a day. During that week, I lost around eight pounds. Since weight is difficult for me to gain, that loss mattered. It showed me that even when I am sick, I need to respect nutrition as part of recovery, not as something that only matters during training.

Food, illness, and recovery

The meal data left me disappointed, mostly because the third week became disproportionate to my normal intake. Still, the pattern was useful. My body needs consistency. When training is high, calories become part of discipline. When illness interrupts training, calories remain part of discipline because they support repair. I learned that recovery is not passive. It still requires intentional nourishment.

Sleep and the conditions of rest

The sleep data was more complex. At Western, my sleep was affected by noise from my roommate, light in the room, and outside light. My dorm room did not have curtains, and my roommate sometimes returned late or left lights on, making it harder to fall asleep. Even with those disruptions, I slept around eight hours and thirty minutes per night and felt refreshed most mornings.

At home, the environment was quieter and more controlled, yet being sick pushed my schedule back by about two hours. I often fell asleep at midnight or later, although I woke up fewer times and slept just under nine hours per night. This made me realize that sleep quality is not only about the room. It is also about the state of the body and the state of the mind entering sleep.

One important change was that I stopped eating before bed. I learned that avoiding food in the hours before sleep gives the body time to digest before rest. In the weeks following the experiment, I continued the practice and noticed better mood and energy levels in the morning. The study confirmed that I have generally healthy sleep standards, but it also made clear that small behaviors before bed can shape the quality of the next day.

Movement, rest, and the discipline to stop

The physical and sedentary logs showed that, during the first two weeks, I did not have many sedentary behaviors outside of school. Most of my sitting came from class or studying. I was surprised to see that I spent at least two hours each day in physical activity, usually through basketball, trail running, biking, or weight training.

The problem was not laziness. If anything, it was the opposite. I had been neglecting rest, and my body eventually forced me into it. During the third week, while sick, I took four days away from working out. Those four days felt much longer than they were. I spent more time on the couch, but I still walked my dog each day for fresh air. By the end of the week, I returned to light movement through the Peloton and basketball at 24 Hour Fitness.

The break was frustrating, but it was also useful. It taught me that rest is not a failure of discipline. Rest is part of discipline. Without it, the body eventually takes the choice away. Rest supports clearer mental health, reduced stress, immune function, and long-term performance. The study helped me understand that improvement is not only produced by effort. It is also protected by recovery.

Training intensity and self-knowledge

The final measurement was planned exercise intensity. I tracked heart rate and how hard I was pushing myself. Four out of five planned exercises took place with other people, and the data showed that I often pushed harder when training with others. Still, my most difficult workout happened alone on the Peloton Endurance Bike.

Tracking training intensity was valuable because it corrected the story I sometimes told myself during exercise. There were days when I felt as if I was pushing harder than I actually was. Measuring intensity helped me understand whether I was operating at 45 percent, 80 percent, or somewhere in between. In the future, this type of measurement can help me train at a safe but rigorous level. It gives effort a clearer structure.

The Deeper Problem: Attention

While analyzing the data, I noticed a behavior that was affecting the quality of my sleep. About half the time, when I was trying to fall asleep, I was watching YouTube or Instagram. This seemed to

influence how late I went to bed. On the surface, that may not seem like a major issue. But I know from experience that technology can become addictive for me, especially when it is used at night.

Many people with phones, especially younger people, experience forms of dependence without fully realizing it. We were introduced to technology early, before we understood what addiction or compulsive behavior could become. When I first used TikTok, I thought nothing of it. But when it began consuming three to four hours of my time every day, I knew something needed to change. I am not on my phone as much now, but it still presents a real problem when I let it enter the edges of the day.

The nights I fell asleep earliest were usually the nights I did not use technology before bed. Those mornings were also the mornings I felt more refreshed. This matters because I would like to be an entrepreneur, and I believe the foundation of success is closely tied to one's mental state. I need to move from consuming technology toward producing beneficial work, praying, meditating, reading, and thinking clearly.

Technology makes me feel as though I need to do more. When I see people online with Lamborghinis or lives portrayed as amazing, it can make me feel behind. At the same time, it can motivate me to work harder. That is part of the danger. The content feels useful because it is wrapped in ambition. The rabbit hole of how to become successful can go on forever. There are thousands of videos about financial freedom, discipline, business, and the steps people took to get where they are. I have watched enough. At some point, watching must become working.

There is also a spiritual problem surrounding technology. It is easy to keep watching because it is comfortable. In a spiritual sense, I believe comfort can become a temptation when it pulls a person away from what they know they need to do. In Matthew 4, Jesus is in the wilderness, fasting for forty days and forty nights, when the devil tempts Him with bread. Jesus responds that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. I take this to mean that we should not rely only on comfort, even when comfort appears justified. We should seek what strengthens us.

Socially, technology is becoming an ever-growing problem. After writing the first part of the original paper, I remember sitting in English class and noticing that nearly everyone was glued to a phone, not speaking to one another. That has become normal. I was not born in the 1900s, but I cannot imagine that classrooms always felt this socially quiet. Humans need face-to-face interaction, and it is becoming less common. To be less distracted, more present, closer to God, and more useful to society, my relationship with technology has to change.

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The Modification Plan

In the past, I changed addictive behaviors by creating an immediate physical consequence. When I caught myself repeating the behavior, I would do pushups. Over time, the behavior became associated with the consequence, and I began to resent the pattern that caused it. I planned to use a similar system for technology.

The first part of the plan was the morning. My instinct had become to wake up and check my phone. The first thing I thought about was answering messages. But why could those messages not wait another thirty minutes? Instead, I planned to wake up, pray for five minutes, meditate for five minutes, and then shower. If I checked my phone during that time, I would do 100 pushups. If I checked it twice, I would do 200, and so on.

The second part of the plan was a daily phone limit. I would begin with a one-hour limit. If I exceeded it, I owed myself 250 pushups. If I exceeded one hour and fifteen minutes, I owed myself another 250. The goal was not punishment for the sake of punishment. The goal was to create awareness strong enough to interrupt the automatic behavior.

The third part of the plan was the night. I would not use technology within an hour of going to bed. Instead, I would pray for ten minutes, meditate for fifteen minutes, and read until I fell asleep. The first twenty-one days would be the hardest. But after enough repetition, the habit would become part of who I was becoming.

To be successful, I wrote that I would simply not disappoint myself. I did not need anyone else's support more than my own. I needed to do what I knew I needed to do. I might fail a few times, but if I kept the consequence and returned to the system, I would become mentally stronger and physically stronger.

What the Data Finally Showed

The three weeks of studying meals, sleep, physical activity, sedentary behavior, and exercise intensity were beneficial because they made my habits visible. The data showed the areas that needed work, but it also showed the good things I could be proud of. I was active. I cared about recovery. I wanted to improve. I was willing to look honestly at patterns that were shaping my life.

The study also showed me that wellness is not only physical. Food, sleep, movement, and rest matter deeply, but so does attention. If technology changes when I sleep, how I think, how I compare myself to others, and how present I am to the people around me, then technology belongs inside any serious conversation about wellness.

Rewards, satisfaction, and joy do not come from the pleasures of life alone. They come from the work we put in, the discipline we keep, and the person we become through repeated action. If I believe in myself and understand the power within myself, then I cannot let small comforts quietly govern my future. Owning my data was never only about tracking numbers. It was about learning where I had given away ownership of myself.

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Sources Cited in the Original Study

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Author's Note

This piece has been reformatted from an earlier wellness study into a publication-style essay. The structure has been revised for a personal writing site, while the central voice, reflections, and intent have been preserved.