

A FIELD GUIDE · OCTOBER 2026

Reclaim Your *Scroll*

Anti-doomscrolling apps and devices, ranked by the evidence behind them and what they cost.

1

consumer app with peer-reviewed results

57%

fewer app openings after six weeks in that study

\$0

to start with the two best-supported tools

THE BOTTOM LINE

The best-supported options are also the cheapest.

Only one consumer anti-scrolling app, One Sec, has been tested in a peer-reviewed study. The best-supported approaches are a short pause before a chosen app opens, and a full break from mobile internet. Paying more mostly buys strictness, polish and extras, not proven results.

This guide surveys about two dozen tools available in October 2026. Each is graded on the evidence behind it, how hard it is to get around, and what it costs in the US. Prices change often, so check the app store before you buy.

HOW THE TOOLS ARE GRADED

The grade measures proof, not popularity.

A

TESTED APP

The app itself has been tested in a peer-reviewed study.

B

PROVEN MECHANISM

Its core mechanism, a delay before opening or an enforced block, has research support. The app itself has not been independently tested.

C

UNVERIFIED CLAIMS

A plausible approach (games, rewards, accountability, AI coaching, feed filtering, limits you can dismiss) backed only by the maker's own claims.

D

NOT BUILT TO CUT SCROLLING

It offers something else to do instead.

BYPASS DIFFICULTY

Soft you can tap through. **Medium** a block you can end in settings or by paying. **Hard** a physical object or locked mode stands in your way.

PRICE

US list prices as of October 2026. "Free" means a usable free tier exists. Several prices come from competitors' comparison pages, so confirm in the store.

No study compares these apps head to head. Within a grade, the order reflects price and strictness, not measured results.

AT A GLANCE

The strongest evidence costs the least.

Each tool placed by evidence grade (down) and the cost of its full version, per year or one-time (across).

GRADE	FREE	UP TO \$20	\$21 TO \$60	OVER \$60
A Tested app		One Sec free for one app		
B Proven mechanism	ScreenZen Foqos	Habit Doom Autonomous Key	BePresent Bloom Freedom Clearspace Brick Jomo	Unpluq Opal
C Unverified claims	Screen Time / Digital Wellbeing Forest	Minimalist launchers Focus Friend Haserupt Dull	AI Chat Anti-Doomscroll	
D Not built to cut scrolling	Replacement apps			

Best value: strongest evidence at the lowest cost
The only app tested in a peer-reviewed study

FocusGuard is not shown because its Pro price is not published. Jomo's annual plan is discounted from its \$5.99 monthly price.

THE RANKINGS

22 tools, ranked.

One Sec ranks first: it is the only app with peer-reviewed results, and it is free for one app. ScreenZen is the best free option, using the same delay mechanism. Spending more buys strictness, not stronger evidence.

#	TOOL	HOW IT WORKS	GRADE	BYPASS	PRICE (US)	PLATFORMS
GRADE A • TESTED IN A PEER-REVIEWED STUDY						
1	One Sec	Breathing pause before a chosen app opens	A	Soft	Free for 1 app; Pro \$19.99/yr or \$99.99 lifetime	iOS, Android, browser
GRADE B • PROVEN MECHANISM						
2	ScreenZen	Delay that grows with each open; limits; optional strict block	B	Soft to Medium	Free (donations)	iOS, Android, Mac
3	Foqos	Tap an NFC tag or QR code to block and unblock	B	Hard	Free, open source (tag extra)	iOS
4	Habit Doom	Apps stay blocked until your habits are done	B	Medium	Free for 3 habits; Pro \$19.99/yr	iOS, Android
5	Autonomous Key	Physical key unlocks blocked apps	B	Hard	\$20 one-time	iOS, Android
6	BePresent	Blocking sessions, streaks, friend competition, real-world rewards	B	Medium	Free; Pro \$24.99 to \$29.99/yr; Family \$99.99/yr	iOS
7	Bloom	NFC card blocker that allows planned breaks	B	Medium	About \$39 one-time	iOS
8	Freedom	Blocks apps and sites on every device at once	B	Medium to Hard	Limited free tier; Premium \$39.99/yr	iOS, Android, Mac, Windows, Chrome
9	Clearspace	Blocks, accountability partners, exercise to earn time	B	Medium	\$44.99 to \$59.99/yr	iOS
10	Brick	Physical puck; apps stay blocked until you tap it	B	Hard	\$59 one-time	iOS, Android
11	Jomo	Scheduled blocking sessions	B	Medium	Free; \$5.99/mo or a discounted annual plan	iOS
12	Unplug	NFC tag plus digital barriers as a fallback	B	Medium to Hard	About \$79 first year, then about \$35/yr	iOS, Android
13	Opal	Scheduled blocks, focus score; can't-quit mode on Pro	B	Medium; Hard on Pro	Free; Pro \$99.99/yr or \$399 lifetime	iOS, Android

#	TOOL	HOW IT WORKS	GRADE	BYPASS	PRICE (US)	PLATFORMS
GRADE C • UNVERIFIED CLAIMS						
14	Screen Time / Digital Wellbeing	Built-in usage stats and app limits	C	Soft	Free, built in	iOS, Android
15	Minimalist launchers	Strip the home screen to essentials	C	Soft	Free to \$9.99/yr	Mostly Android
16	Forest	Grow a virtual tree while the phone stays down	C	Medium	Free; optional Forest Plus	iOS, Android
17	Focus Friend	Cozy focus timer; Deep Focus locks apps	C	Medium	Free; Pro \$14.99/yr	iOS, Android
18	Haserupt	Asks your purpose, grants a short window, then a cool-off	C	Medium	Free; paid from \$9.99	iOS
19	FocusGuard	AI coach that tapers screen time week by week	C	Medium	Free basic; Pro paid	iOS
20	Dull	Removes Reels, Shorts and For You feeds (also UNDOOMED, \$17.99/yr)	C	Medium	\$14.99/yr or \$59.99 lifetime	iOS
21	AI Chat Anti-Doomscroll	Convince an AI before a blocked app opens	C	Medium	\$29.99/yr or \$7.99/mo	iOS
GRADE D • NOT BUILT TO CUT SCROLLING						
22	Replacement apps	Duolingo, Headspace, NYT Games and similar	D	None	Mostly free	iOS, Android

Platforms list what could be confirmed from store listings and reviews; some apps may run on more devices. Tool names link to the source used.

Match the approach to how you slip.

Almost every tool uses one of nine approaches. Pick the approach that fits your pattern, then pick the cheapest tool that does it.

01

Pause before opening

One Sec • ScreenZen • Haserupt

A short wait stands between you and the app. Best for reflexive opens: in One Sec's study, users backed out about a third of the time.

02

Scheduled blocking

Opal • Freedom • Jomo • BePresent • Clearspace

Chosen apps go dark during set hours. Best for protecting work, sleep or family time. Freedom also covers your computer.

03

Earn your time

Habit Doom • Clearspace challenges

Apps unlock only after a habit or a workout. Best for people who respond to a fair trade.

04

Physical keys

Brick • Bloom • Unplug • Autonomous Key • Foqos

The off switch is an object you leave in another room. The strictest approach and the hardest to cancel on impulse.

05

Gamified focus

Forest • Focus Friend

A virtual tree or character suffers if you pick up the phone. Popular with students and anyone motivated by streaks.

06

Feed filters

Dull • UNDOOMED

Keep the social app; lose Reels, Shorts and the For You feed. Best if you need social media for work or family. iPhone only, through the filter's own browser.

07

Built-ins and launchers

Screen Time • Digital Wellbeing • dumbphone-style home screens

Free and already on your phone, but the limits are easy to dismiss.

08

AI coaches

FocusGuard • Nomie • Haserupt • AI Chat Anti-Doomscroll

New in 2026: argue your case to an AI before an app opens, or get coaching tailored to your usage. Untested, and user bases are still small.

09

Something better to do

Duolingo • Headspace • NYT Games

These don't cut scrolling by design. They give your hand something better to reach for.

Friction and real breaks work. Reminders alone don't.

Two peer-reviewed studies carry most of the weight in this field, and both point the same way.

PNAS • 2023 • MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE AND HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY

The One Sec field study

Researchers followed 280 One Sec users for six weeks, then ran a 500-person experiment to test each part of the app separately.

36%

of open attempts ended with the user closing the app after the pause

57%

fewer actual app openings by week six, from back-outs plus fewer attempts

The door wins

the option to back out had the strongest effect; the delay also helped; the reflective message alone did not

PNAS NEXUS • 2025 • RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL

Blocking mobile internet for two weeks

An app blocked all mobile internet for two weeks while calls and texts kept working.

314 → 161

minutes of daily screen time, before and during the block (it rebounded to 265 after)

91%

of participants improved on at least one of mental health, well-being or attention

~10 yrs

the sustained-attention gain was comparable to reversing a decade of typical age-related decline

- Gains were partly explained by how people used the freed time: more in-person socializing, exercise and time in nature.

Friction beats reminders.

A tool that only shows a motivational message is the weakest choice.

Results fade when the tool stops.

Screen time rebounded after the block lifted. Plan for a habit you keep, not a one-time detox.

The freed time matters.

The benefits came from what people did instead. Decide in advance what the reclaimed minutes are for.

PICK YOUR STARTING POINT

Start free. Pay only if it doesn't hold.

Most people should begin with One Sec or ScreenZen.

IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE YOU	START HERE	COST
<i>"I open apps without thinking."</i>	One Sec or ScreenZen	Free
<i>"Money is tight."</i>	ScreenZen, One Sec's free tier, or your phone's built-in limits	Free
<i>"I need social media, but short videos swallow me."</i>	Dull or UNDOOMED	About \$15 to \$18/yr
<i>"I need my phone, just not during work or sleep."</i>	Freedom, which also covers your computer	\$39.99/yr
<i>"I cheat on every blocker."</i>	Brick, or Foqos with an NFC tag	\$59 once, or free plus a tag
<i>"I'm a student who can't focus."</i>	Focus Friend or Forest	Free
<i>"I want a real reset."</i>	A two-week mobile internet break, using a blocker that can cut the whole internet, such as Freedom	Free trial, then \$39.99/yr
<i>"I'm setting this up for my family."</i>	One Sec Family or BePresent Family	\$29.99 or \$99.99/yr

THE MISSING PIECE

Whichever tool you choose, decide in advance what the reclaimed time is for. That is the idea behind the AttentionPlease™ Two Screens Method™.



Learn more at attentionplease.ai

Most app-store numbers are marketing, not measurement.

- 1 Self-reported results.** Opal says its users have saved over 500 million hours, measured against the screen time people report when they sign up. There is no comparison group.
- 2 Borrowed evidence.** Some apps quote One Sec's 57% figure for their own features; Dull's listing does this. That number belongs to One Sec's study, not theirs.
- 3 Reviews written by rivals.** Many "best app" comparisons are published by app makers ranking their own product. Habit Doom, Dull and Autonomous all publish them. Use those pages for facts like prices, not for verdicts.
- 4 Subscriptions that renew.** Free trials roll into paid plans, and deleting an app does not cancel its subscription. Cancel in your app store account.
- 5 Limits you can switch off.** On Android, every screen-time app works through permissions the phone's owner can turn off in Settings. A determined user can always get around software.

SOURCES

RESEARCH

Directing smartphone use through the self-nudge app one sec, PNAS, 2023

Blocking mobile internet on smartphones improves sustained attention, mental health, and subjective well-being, PNAS Nexus, 2025

One Sec: Max Planck study summary

Refinery29: One Sec review and study size

PsyPost: mobile internet block study

Healio via MD Psych Foundation: 91% improved

PRICES AND FEATURES

One Sec in-app prices (App Pricing Lab)

ScreenZen, BePresent, Freedom, Clearspace, Focus Friend, FocusGuard and AI Chat Anti-Doomscroll App Store listings

Freedom overview

Opal: 500 million hours and Opal pricing review

Brick vs Foqos, Unplug and Opal and Brick alternatives

Brick vs Bloom and Best Brick alternatives

Habit Doom: ScreenZen comparison and pricing

Jomo alternatives and pricing

Best screen time apps for Android

Dull vs UNDOOMED and Dull listing

Haserupt and Nomie

Forest app review, 2026

WhistleOut: best screen time apps

Shortform: apps to replace doomscrolling