

Wellness



Social Media for Mental Health



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It's been said time and time again, but it still rings true: Social media can be overwhelming.

Yet, we are still using social media apps and websites like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter at an increasing rate. According to the Pew Research Center, 69% of adults in the United States use social media, and depending on what source you look at, at least 51% of those adults report using social media at higher rates during the last few months of the pandemic.

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And, while it can be fun scrolling through friends' marriage and baby announcements, endless vacation inspiration, heated political writing, and your favorite influencer's wellness and beauty routines, it may simultaneously be taking an unconscious (or even conscious, but unacknowledged) toll on your mental health. Studies have actually found that heavy users of social media are more likely to be depressed, anxious, resentful, and more self-scrutinizing of their physical appearance and general lifestyle. Plus, all the screen time can lead to headaches and disrupt healthy sleep cycles.

On the opposite side of all of this, though, social media is helping us stay in touch with loved ones (particularly ones we can't see during stay-at-home orders), foster new connections, discover new recipes and vacation spots, and tell important stories. Social media can act as a personal digital scrapbook, a source of comfort and community, and a place for learning.

So, how do you balance opening up social media apps for authentic community, connection, and inspiration without sabotaging your mental health in the often overwhelming digital space? Simply put, you can take the time to curate your social media channels for your mental health. Here's how:

Audit Who You Follow

Look through your Facebook friends or accounts you follow on Instagram and honestly assess, removing any accounts that may stir up negativity for you. After years of personally following dozens of college acquaintances that I hadn't spoken to in years, travel and beauty influencers, and brand accounts, I made the decision to unfriend and unfollow nearly everyone who wasn't a close friend, a cute animal account, or a mental health professional. Scrolling is now marked with less envy and instead replaced with true happiness about my friends' happiness (or those cute dog and cat pals!). And, at the end of the day, people you may unfriend or unfollow will not fault you for making the best decision for you.

Follow Professional Mental Health Practitioners

Therapists and psychologists are meeting us where we're at these days, and on top of offering Zoom appointments, many have started their own Instagram accounts. These accounts share daily tips, tricks, journal prompts, and useful mantras, normalizing therapy, and serving as an accessible reminder about self-growth and self-reflection. Posts from therapists scattered among your social scrolling can offer a punch of positivity that you may need. Instead of feeding into the comparison game we inevitably play on social media, these accounts offer a safe space for growth that can supplement regular mental health activities like therapy, meditation, or talking with your community.

Set Screen Time Limits

Rather than endlessly using social media, stop the cycle to ensure you are enjoying real life off the screen, too, by setting specific time limits on your Screen Time settings. Once I reach my time limit on social media, my phone automatically kicks me off the app or website and sends me back to my home screen, offering the self-control I know I need.

Social media will always be overwhelming, but these apps can work for you and not against you.