social media & mental health

Social media is a huge part of our society, and it's not going anywhere anytime soon. It can be fun for many people and can provide opportunities for connection, education, and representation. However, too much of anything can be bad. For many of us, excessive use of social media can take a toll on our mental health.

## how does social media affect mental health?

overuse

Checking social media throughout the day is a habit for many young folks, and it's not necessarily harmful. However, when we start spending more time on social media than we do connecting IRL, **feelings of isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety can increase.**

social comparison

What people post online is a curated image of what they want you to see. Even though most of us know that, **it's still human nature to compare our lives and selves to the highlights of others' lives** on social media, this can create feelings of envy, dissatisfaction about your life and appearance, inadequacy, and low self-worth.

why doesn't my body look like that?
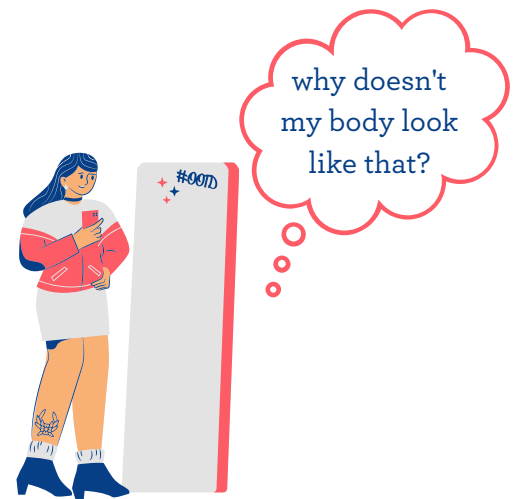
false information

I do that too, so I must have the same condition!

There's a lot of inaccurate information on social media, and mental health information is no exception. While some general information or advice can make folks feel validated, there's also **the danger of unqualified people sharing whatever they want** or believe totally unchecked. This can lead to lots of problems and dangers, such as folks self-diagnosing based on something they saw on TikTok.

sources: helpguide.org, CDC
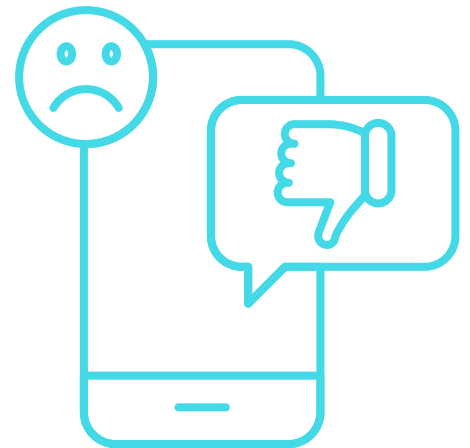
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fomo

Social media, especially stories, are notorious for causing FOMO **(the fear of missing out).** We've all been there. You see a friend post an IG story and it looks like they're having a blast at a concert. Or we see a stranger posting about their huge birthday celebration. Our internal negative voice might wonder: "Why wasn't I invited? They must not really like me," or "I could never get that many people to come to my party." **The feeling that everyone else is living a better life than you can impact your self-worth.**

cyber bullying

About 16% of teens in grades 9-12 experienced cyberbullying. This can look like rumors spreading on Twitter, an embarrassing Snapchat video being sent around to the whole school, fake accounts being made to send nasty DMs, and so much more. **Many people find it easier to forget the humanity of a person being bullied when they're behind a screen,** and the bullying becomes more vicious. Cyberbullying can lead to long lasting mental scars for the victim, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, self-harm and thoughts of suicide.

signs social media is impacting your mental health

- being distracted at school/work
- feeling the urge to constantly check social media
- using social media to compare yourself with others
- spending more time online than with family & friends
- using social media to escape "bad" feelings
- increased feelings of anxiety, depression & loneliness

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We're not here to tell you to quit social media altogether because we know that isn't realistic for most people. So how can you still use social media AND protect your mental health? Here are a few of our favorite tips:

steer clear of...

- Scrolling while doing other things, such as watching a movie, eating with family, or hanging out with friends.
- **Following people who post highly edited pictures and videos,** especially if they post content telling you how to be "just like them."
- Engaging with creators who tell you that a certain behavior means you have a certain diagnosis. Also, be mindful about checking folks' credentials if they're claiming to be an expert on anything.
- Watching stories of people going out when you've decided to have a night in, or when you just happen to not have any plans**. Remember, one IG story doesn't give you the REAL story!**
- Spreading online rumors, leaving nasty comments, or sharing videos of someone that you don't have permission to share. If you're experiencing cyberbullying, you don't have to "just deal with it."

lean into...

- Practicing mindfulness by **going phone-free** during meals, movies, & time with friends or family.
- **Diverse & relatable creators who don't heavily edit photos or pretend that their lives can be replicated.** For example, follow fitness creators who post about joyful movement as opposed to changing your appearance.
- Engaging with mental health professionals who only post general information as opposed to individual advice or diagnoses, AND people sharing their stories who make it clear that their experience does not equal expertise.
- **Finding self-worth outside of social plans you may or may not have.** What hobbies or activities do you enjoy that you can participate in? What support people, or even pets, can you spend time with?
- **Spreading positivity and empowerment on social media.** If you see someone being bullied, say something. If you're experiencing cyberbullying, ask for help from a trusted adult. It's not your fault.