

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of Social Media: The Effects of Social Media On Mental Health.

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What is the first thing you do when you open your eyes? Do you stretch and stand up to make some coffee, or do you lie for a bit and start scrolling through your phone? In moments of boredom and lull, what is the first thing you do to keep yourself busy? Do you go out and socialize? Or does chilling in the couch with a phone in hand sound more appealing?

All of these point out some of the attachments that we have with social media. Ever since the pandemic in 2020, there has been a worldwide increase in the use of social media allowing people connected during moments of isolation. Since then, mental health and social media have become increasingly intertwined turning social media as something that many people depend on for amusement, connection and as a distraction.

The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

What impact does social media have on our mental health?

Studies have shown that social media is linked to a variety of mental health issues, including:

- Depression,
- Anxiety,
- Low self-esteem.
- Increased feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The amount of time spent on social media can also be a have negative health impacts, as it can lead to:

- Decreased productivity,
- Lack of sleep,
- Bullying,
- Digital addiction

Social media may cause these issues and create envy of what others may have. One of the most toxic things about the influencing trend is the way it changes reality. It is only natural for people to want to show the best side of themselves, but influencers often filter their faces, use effects to change the shape of their bodies and portray a very extravagant and luxurious lifestyle. In this way, social media may encourage negative experiences such as: Inadequacy about your life or appearance.

Social media can also create the feeling that without being online you may miss something important. Fear of Missing Out” or FOMO, describes the anxiety we feel when others are having rewarding experiences without us. FOMO is not exclusive to social media, but browsing social media sets us up for the experience.

The Benefits of Social Media

It is important to remember that it is not all bad. There are also benefits to having social media. Social Media is a powerful communication tool and can serve many useful purposes, such as:

- The elimination of distance and time allows connections to be made and maintained both near and far.
- A tool to promote awareness and provide information to thousands of people at a time.
- A means of coordination and organization of events and meetups remotely.
- A way to create like-minded communities and provide information and knowledge – think of all the accounts devoted to certain subjects like Wellness, DIY ideas, Fitness Trends, Movies, Cars, Hobbies and too many others to name.
- The elimination of time constraints in communication and planning.

The To-Do List

So how do we treat social media moving forward? Here are the things that you can do to keep your mental health in tip-top shape, while diving into social media.

1. Schedule your time with social media.

Your world does not revolve around social media. Treat social media as you would a meeting with a friend, or even gaming. Carve out specific times in the day to check your phone.

2. Be Purposeful about your Social Media Use

Mindlessly scrolling through social media can cause negative emotions or stress. Whether it is a triggering topic, or an obstinate post. Try using social media with a definite subject in mind, whether it be a topic of interest or something that you wanted to try in your life.

Social media has a plethora of information that can build your knowledge about the topic.

3. **If it is bedtime, it is bedtime.**

Put your phone away when it is time to go to bed. The blue light emitted from your devices is known to disrupt your body's sleep schedule as it tricks your brain into thinking that there is still light and therefore to stay alert. Thirty minutes before sleeping, place your phone on the far side of your room and put it in silent mode. If having your device near you is a necessity, look for an option called night light on your phone. It is used to reduce the blue light that is emanating from the screen and lowers the chance of your sleep cycle getting disrupted.

4. **Treat social media as an idea invoker, not a standard bearer.**

Social media should not be the standard by which you judge yourself. Ever. If you see a good-looking person or something beautiful on social media? Admire it and move on. You are your own person, and you are what makes you.

Conclusion

Consider social media as a tool rather than entertainment or a means to pass time. Approaching it in this manner may alleviate some of the negative impacts it may have and highlight some of the benefits. Making small changes to how you approach your social media use and how you connect with the content can have a big impact on your mental health.

The content was adapted from the following resources:

McLean Hospital
Harvard University
On the Line Australia
Frontiers

By Eprex Balucay, Peer Wellness Ambassador