Social media and your mental health

Setting boundaries and forming healthy habits

Social media is a powerful tool that has transformed the way people connect, communicate, and share information. While these are just a few positives of using social media, spending too much time online can also have negative effects. Did you know: 74% of adults under 30 report using five or more social media platforms and 40% of Americans report being online "constantly." Setting boundaries and forming healthy habits around social media can help minimize negative effects on your mental health.

Check in with yourself

Start by evaluating your emotions using a few examples from the chart below. Do you experience more positive or negative effects when spending time on social media?

POSITIVE EMOTIONS AND BENEFITS	NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND SIDE EFFECTS
⊕ Connected when engaging with friends, family, or other online communities	⊖ Anxious when receiving constant notifications or a fear of missing out on others' experiences
⊕ Informed through news articles, informational accounts, or fresh perspectives	⊖ Jealous or inadequate when comparing yourself to others
⊕ Entertained by funny videos, memes, or lighthearted content	⊖ Overwhelmed by the nonstop flow of news, information, or content
⊕ Motivated or supported by inspirational posts, goal-oriented accounts, or online support groups	⊖ Distracted or drained because you are scrolling out of habit or avoidance
⊕ Empowered when sharing about your life, work, or achievements	⊖ Lonely when online interactions feel superficial instead of meaningful

IDEA BOX: Use this space to journal about the emotions you experience when using social media. Do different platforms bring up different emotions?

Approach social media with intention

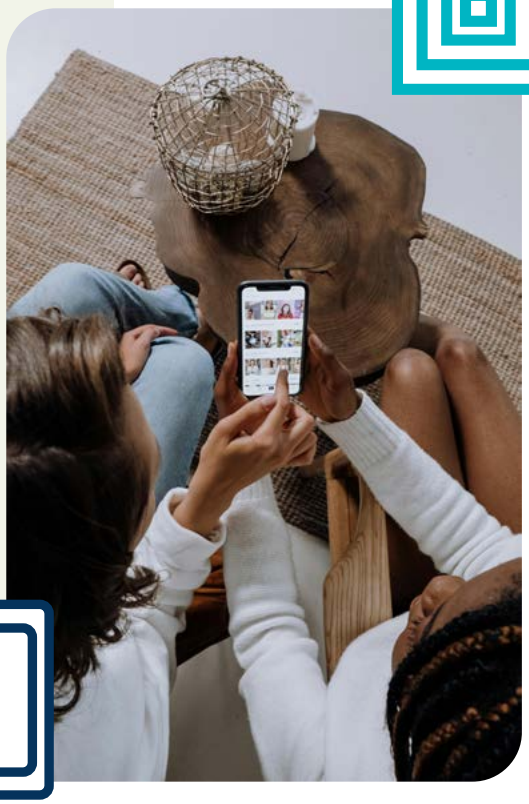
Even when social media is a positive experience, you can't control everything that appears on your feed. Here are a few reminders about how to approach social media with intention.

THINGS I CAN CONTROL	THINGS I CAN'T CONTROL
Who I follow and the content I engage with on social media	What other people comment on social media
Evaluating the credibility of information and news sources	False or inaccurate information
Reporting content that is harmful, damaging, or misleading	Harmful content without trigger warnings
Who I follow and the content I engage with on social media	What other people comment on social media
What parts of my life I choose to share online	How often my friends and family use social media
Turning off or limiting cell phone notifications, especially after hours or near bedtime	Using social media that is required for work or daily communication

Artificial intelligence on social media

Artificial intelligence plays an increasingly large role in shaping what you see on social media platforms. Recommended content and targeted advertisements can make your social media experience feel more relevant and engaging, but also has potential downsides for mental health.

Content that is curated to maximize attention often uses emotionally charged posts or addicting videos. This may increase the amount of time you spend online, sometimes at the expense of your emotional or financial wellbeing. Heavily edited or "filtered" images can also contribute to an unrealistic or unhealthy body image. Try to be mindful about how different types of content make you feel, and use this resource to help set boundaries around the factors you can control.



Building healthy habits

Technology is everywhere and social media might be difficult to avoid in your daily life. If you are interested in establishing a social media routine that protects your mental health, here are a few ideas:

Set clear boundaries around time on social media
Example: Not looking at social media during school or work hours

Create tech-free zones
Example: Your bedroom or the dinner table

Limit your time spent on certain platforms
Example: Watching YouTube for one hour in the evening

Use technology to your advantage
Example: Use apps to track your time on social media and set new time limits, if needed

Curate your social media experience
Example: Unfollow accounts that trigger you or limit notifications on your phone

Remember that social media content can be heavily edited
Example: Don't compare your photos to others, especially as images become more filtered and artificial

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Six actions to take today

Using the ideas and examples on the previous page, create a personalized action list of ways to protect your mental health when using technology.

1 **Set clear boundaries around tech time**

I will be available through technology the following times each day:

2 **Create tech-free zones**

My tech-free zones are:

3 **Limit technology time**

I will limit technology time to _____ minutes or hours each day.

4 **Use technology to your advantage**

The following apps, tools, or features support my mental health:

5 **Curate your social media experience**

The following types of content or platforms leave me feeling drained or anxious:

6 **Remember the "artificial" is becoming more prevalent**

I will plan at least _____ in-person connection(s) each week.

Looking for more support?

Just as you would see a doctor for physical health issues, like a cold or pain, you can also talk to a doctor about your mental health. A few places to start include talking to your general practitioner for recommendations, checking resources within your health insurance network, exploring resources through your workplace, or researching telehealth networks online. For more information about setting boundaries to protect your mental health, check out this resource from NAMI.