

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA FUELS STRESS AND ANXIETY AND HOW TO MANAGE IT

Did you know that, on average, young people spend around three hours every day on social media? If you think this seems too much or that no-one could possibly have that amount of free time, check your own usage. If you have a smartphone, look at the screen time tab under your settings. It will tell you exactly how much time you personally spend on social media and where you tend to spend it the most. The results may surprise you.

Netflix's 90-minute documentary *The Social Dilemma* has caused quite a stir online and successfully highlighted the pitfalls of having a social media habit. It's not an exaggeration to say that social media has the power to take over a person's life. Which is why - before you take another scroll through Facebook - it's of paramount importance you understand the impact social media has on your time and attention.

Here are some guidelines to help you understand your relationship with social media.

01 Social media is designed to be addictive

You know that pleasant feeling you get when your post gets a positive response, or the number of likes start to climb? That's the release of dopamine, and it so happens to be the very chemical that keeps drug addicts hooked on specific substances. According to some of the neuroscientists who were interviewed for *The Social Dilemma* documentary, the retweets, likes, and comments, feed the brain's reward system and cause a chemical reaction that's similar to the one cocaine creates in the brain. It's like a syringe of dopamine is being injected straight into your nervous system.

02 The business model is designed to keep you engaged on the screen

According to Tim Kendall, former president of Pinterest, this is how the platforms were designed. To keep you hooked and keep you scrolling. Massive amounts of research on the human psyche were involved in creating these platforms, to understand how to keep users constantly engaged. By feeding the content you want to see and regularly updating functionality. Simply put, your attention and engagement are being sold to advertisers who need to sell products to you.

Because these platforms continuously gather data about you, they are able to keep you constantly engaged, by feeding you videos, links to specific articles or news based on your social media preferences. This carefully constructed business system enables these digital companies to grow audiences and deepen engagement, which in turn allows them to sell these audiences to more advertisers.

03 Social media can cause mental health problems, especially in young people

Research confirms the impact of social media on mental health. One study published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* discovered a strong link between social media use and loneliness, as well as depression. Furthermore, when participants started cutting back on their social media usage over the course of the study, rates of depression and loneliness fell dramatically.



Elements like cyberbullying, FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) and feelings of inadequacy are all fast-tracked by social media. Studies confirm the youth are particularly vulnerable to these effects. According to Jonathan Haidt, PhD and Social Psychologist at New York University's School of Business, "there has been a "gigantic increase" in the cases of anxiety and depression in American adolescents, spurred on by social media addiction." He is not alone. Many psychologists have confirmed the link between the rise in suicides and cyberbullying, increased social media use and addiction.

In addition to anxiety, depression and loneliness, someone who is addicted to social media might also experience some of the following symptoms:

- Trouble sleeping at night due to increased exposure to blue light at random intervals
- Poor concentration at work or school
- Difficulty in maintaining healthy relationships in real life
- Reduced ability to empathize with others
- Onset of social anxiety disorder
- Low self-esteem arising from comparing one's life to many of the idyllic lifestyles portrayed on social media, which are often unrealistic and out of the reach of most people

It's up to you to take control

So, should you delete your social media accounts and go completely cold turkey? Well, of course this is easier said than done. It might not be that simple for everyone, because most of us need these accounts for business, keeping in touch with friends and family overseas, or consuming important news updates.

However, it is important to start understanding how much time you or your family are spending on social media and how much is helpful and healthy. Here are just a few tips to help you find a good balance.

01 If you struggle to focus and constantly feel tempted to check your phone, simply turn it off while you work, when you are spending time with loved ones, or when you need to concentrate on a specific task. If you need to be available for emergencies, keep your phone in a different room and only reach for it if you are being called.

02 Turn off your push notifications.

03 Set up your screen time allowance according to how much time you are really willing to spend online.

04 Get involved in a new hobby that will keep your mind busy and productive.

Start practicing just a few of these habits and you will soon witness the change you want to see in your smartphone's screen time report.

If you or your loved one needs support during this time, reach out to your ICAS EHWP via your toll-free number to seek counselling support. Alternatively, download the ICAS On-the-Go App and login with your Company App Code.

Call your dedicated **Toll-Free Line**.

(Free from landline and mobile phones.)

Or request a call back: ***134*905#**

Applicable to you and those who live under your roof.

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