

Seven ways to use social media to benefit your mental health

Social media and new technologies make it easier than ever to connect with friends, family and others that share the same interests as we do. They can help decrease feelings of isolation and loneliness. But excessive social media use can also alter our mood, motivation and concentration. Research shows that constantly checking social media sites can increase feelings of inadequacy and depression, as well as anxiety around the fear of missing out.

Fortunately, there are ways to reap the benefits of social media without being impacted by the risks. Here are seven strategies on how to use social media to benefit your mental health:



1 Think about your goals.

Remember that social media is a tool – use it to achieve your personal and professional goals. Are you using it to connect with friends, family, colleagues? Are you using it to get your daily news? Are you using it to create professional social networks? Choose apps and platforms that fit with your goals accordingly and that contribute to positive behaviours. Participate in virtual communities that are supportive and provide insight into people, events or areas that interest you offline.

2 Engage, don't scroll.

Studies show that when people spend a lot of time passively consuming information on social media – such as scrolling, reading, and clicking on links – they report feeling worse afterward. In contrast, when people actively engage online by sharing, posting photos, and commenting, research has shown that it can increase positive well-being. Use social platforms to help feel connected to others or to learn about resources you might use to improve your life offline.

If you're unsure whether a social media platform is improving or dampening your mood, take some time after using it to check in and ask yourself "how does this app make me feel?" This will shift the focus from how much time you spend on the app to how it impacts you on a human level.

3 Avoid comparisons.

View posts on social media with the perspective that they are only a highlight reel of someone's life. One survey revealed that more than 60 per cent of people admit to lying constantly on social media. Remember that celebrities and other influencers on social media are often paid to promote products and services through social media posts, and as a result, their photos and posts are often 'touched up' for marketing purposes.

4 Share mindfully.

Always pause and consider before posting. Remember that sharing personal information can cost you your privacy and safety. In addition, educational institutions and potential employers could review your online presence when considering your application. Everything on the Internet is permanent and even privacy settings are limited in their capacity – keep that in mind every time you share.

If you are feeling emotional but want to reach out to someone on social media, consider sending a voicenote or FaceTime instead. Studies show that it's common for people to misinterpret text messages, while voice is rich with tone and less vulnerable to misinterpretation.

5 Allow notifications from people, not machines.

Remember that social media apps are developed and engineered to encourage you to check in consistently with notifications and new content. To avoid mindlessly checking apps, turn off all notifications except those from real people – apps like WhatsApp, Messages, FB Messenger, etc.

6 Address bullying.

Your social media profile should be a safe space. Have a zero tolerance policy for bullying on your social media channels and do not be afraid to block and report any kind of harassment directed at yourself or others. Take screenshots of harassment and if someone threatens your safety or shares sexual pictures or videos of you, report it to the police immediately.

7 Take time to unplug.

Research shows that taking breaks from social media and other forms of technology can help increase feelings of subjective well-being. If a full digital detox seems impossible, try these simple tips for a quick time-out:

- Study with your phone out of the room – research shows that the mere presence of these devices reduces available cognitive capacity.
- Limit use at bedtime as the light from the screen can interfere with your sleep. Charge your device outside the bedroom at night and avoid looking at it first thing in the morning.
- Try a device-free dinner or lunch with friends. Enjoy the time interacting together in person.
- Set physical boundaries. Limit your first screen on your phone to just the tools you use for in-and-out tasks – like Maps, Camera, Calendar, or Notes. Move all the rest away from the first page and into folders. Launch apps by typing rather than mindlessly clicking on them. Or delete social media apps from your phone and only use them on the computer.
- Go outside. One of the best ways to improve your mental well-being is by simply spending more time in nature – either by yourself or with someone you enjoy being with.

For more practical tips on improving your well-being, check out our BounceBack videos at: bouncebackvideo.ca (using access code: **bbtodayon**).



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For references, please visit ontario.cmha.ca/bbtipsheet.