

MOBILE MENTAL WELLNESS

DEPRESSION & ANXIETY: SOCIAL MEDIA EDITION

Stress is one of the biggest threats to our health. It can have a significant impact on our mood, sense of well-being, behaviour, relationships, and physical health. Today, one of those stressors is our heavy reliance on technology. It has infiltrated every facet of our lives, and in doing so, has added another layer of stress. New technology is accepted as both good and bad, and social media is no different.



Did you know?

64% of Canadians have a social media account.

2/3 of Canadians use their social media account every day.

Each time we check our Facebook feed, post a photo to Instagram, or send a tweet, we are chasing the feeling of being connected to others. These actions may actually be making us feel lonelier and more disconnected, and contribute to increasing rates of anxiety and depression.

UNDERSTANDING OUR SOCIAL NEEDS

As human beings, we crave connection, seek approval and validation from others, and long for relationships. These needs existed before social media and will continue to even when social media is replaced by new technology.

CONNECTION

Our well-being depends largely on our connections with others. We long for community and relationships. We want to belong. This need is not satisfied by the superficial social connections that exist online.

APPROVAL AND VALIDATION

We are interdependent and seek the approval of others. It is important to find validation in the right places! Main sources include friends, family, partners, counsellors, and other significant people in our lives that we trust and rely upon.

DEEP AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

We are not built for isolation. We need relationships. Being in long-term, healthy relationships makes us feel loved, cared for, and heard. Meaningful relationships make us feel like we matter. They give our lives meaning and can foster our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Emerging research shows a clear, causal link between social media use (specifically passive use) and a rise in mental health issues, especially among youth and young adults. It is time to **EQUIP** ourselves with information on how social media is affecting our mental wellness and the tools that exist to alleviate some of the strain.

Exclusion.

E

Social media makes it easy to judge personal value based on a comparison to others. We see happy families, exciting social lives, and blissful marriages, and we ask, “How does my life compare?” The answer may be discouraging and based on unrealistic expectations, which can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression.

Self-Care Tip

Try not to compare your circumstances to others’. Wherever you are is ok! If you feel the need to compare, see it through your own lens. Are you in an unhappy marriage? Rather than compare it to someone else’s relationship, identify one thing you can do to make your relationship happier.

Quantifying.

Q

A shifting focus on the quantity of connections versus quality is defining loneliness. Quantifying friendships may make our connections broader, but also shallower. While loneliness can occur when one’s connections are fewer, it’s the loss of quality of connections that defines loneliness, which is deeply connected to depression.

Self-Care Tip

Nurture relationships that you value. When sending a DM or a tweet, follow it up with a time to meet. Feeling down and unable to initiate a meeting? That’s ok! Be honest. Communicate your desire to cultivate intimacy and closeness in your relationship, and ask the other party to mutually participate

Use.

U

Social media can be a security blanket for staying connected, a boredom-buster, or your only source of social interaction! Whatever your reasons, social media use in general is connected to depression and anxiety. Studies show that limiting use to 10 minutes daily per platform, there is a significant decrease in anxiety and FOMO (fear of missing out).

Self-Care Tip

Be mindful of the time you spend on your phone and don’t beat yourself up for it. Regulate your use by leaving it at home when socializing, avoid using it when bored by finding a new hobby, and pick times or days throughout the week when you will completely unplug.

Information Overload.

I

The sheer volume of content that we are exposed to each day is overwhelming! Do we really need to know what John ate for lunch? The endless stream of mostly unimportant content distracts us from things that have real meaning and reduces working memory and our capacity to process information.

Self-Care Tip

Be selective and filter who and what you follow, friend, or comment on. Accept that you don’t have to research every thought, or engage with every piece of information you read. Determine a goal or passion and only take in the information that can move you forward.

Popularity.

P

Social media connections (friends, comments, likes, shares) can be a false measurement of popularity. The “positive reinforcement” we find online may not translate into real life and can trap us in a materialistic, unrealistic, ego-driven virtual world.

Self-Care Tip

You are worthy. Be aware that social media can cripple your self-esteem. Try not to seek validation from others about your self-worth or put others on a pedestal. What you are seeing isn’t the full reality. Just be you!

IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU USE IT

Active Social Media Use
is when you actively interact with others on social media.

Passive Social Media Use
is scrolling through feeds and inactively consuming content. Most social media activity is passive.

Would you consider yourself a communicator (active user) on social media or consumer of social media content (passive user)? How you define yourself in relation to your use can determine if social media is having a negative or positive impact on your risk of anxiety and depression. Social media isn't all bad. While passive use is related to negative outcomes, studies show that active use leads to a decrease in depressive symptoms as reported on the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System brief depression scale. Active engagement and communication like sharing stories and opinions, and contributing to discussions, along with access to supports are beneficial to mental wellness. Social media can't be said to cause depression, but it may be a contributor. If you are unsure if social media could be influencing your mental wellness, it's always good to take a break and go back to "old fashioned" leisure activities and reconnect with your authentic self, a friend, or an old or new hobby!

THIS TO DO INSTEAD OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Have some time to spare? Don't reach for your phone or computer! Spend that time engaging in activities that enrich your life and give meaning to your day. Try one of these ideas...



Read a good book.



Enjoy some me-time.



Work up a sweat!



Write in your journal.



Get outside.



Play a game.



Send a thank you card.



Meditate.

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