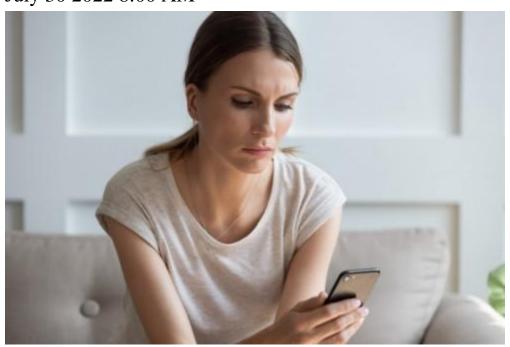# Is Social Media Impacting Your Mental Health?

July 30 2022 8:00 AM

Over the last decade, social media has become an important tool for connecting with loved ones, keeping busy, and staying informed on local and world events, with social media usage increasing even more during the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, it is having a negative impact on the mental health of people across the country, causing an increase in anxiety and depression for many.

Studies around the world have shown the impact of social media on mental health, which brings along with it an increase in anxiety and depression.

"Right now, there are so many people who spend an inordinate amount of time on social media just because some people are stuck at home and kids are not going into schools. I think, in general, mental health can depend on what you are consuming on social media," explains Marybeth Evans, an OSF HealthCare licensed clinical social worker.

Evans warns to proceed with caution when scrolling through social media. Many people tend to highlight only the best parts of their lives which creates an unrealistic snapshot of their day-to-day lives. When others try to compare themselves to this unattainable perfection, it comes at a cost to mental health.

In fact, a documentary that came out during the pandemic called "The Social Dilemma" details a 5,000-person [study](#) finding that higher social media and screen time use correlated with self-reported declines in mental and physical health, and life satisfaction. So, how do we stop this spiral?

"Go through your apps. Make a list of what apps you feel better before you go on than after you go on. Figure out how much time you are spending on each app and be aware that apps can be addicting," Evans says.

Evans adds that it is also helpful to have mobile apps on your phone that are not strictly for social media use.

"Try to spend time on apps that are positive – maybe nature apps or something that you are interested in or develop a new hobby, learn a new language. But try not to spend much time on the apps that are just for the purpose of comparing one person to another."

Evans does not recommend avoiding social media altogether but recommends taking the time to prioritize the apps on your phone and become aware of which ones tend to cause anxiety or stress so you can start to become mindful of this. If you prefer, you can even start a journal to track both the positive and negative feelings you experience when utilizing social media and other apps on your mobile device.

"Time yourself on apps that you spend an inordinate amount of time on and say, 'when my timer rings I'm getting off whether I'm right in the middle of something or not,'" Evans advises.

Allotting a certain amount of time each day for certain apps can be extremely beneficial for your mental health. Most importantly, do not let social media consume you. Set aside time each day to be "phone free."

"The more you click, the further into the rabbit hole you'll go – and I think we all can be free of that. Actually, stay in the here and now. React to the people around us. Even in the cold weather, take a walk. Build a snowman. Do something fun that you maybe haven't done for a long time," encourages Evans.

If you or a loved one is struggling with mental health it is not an emergency, you can reach out to an OSF Behavioral Health navigator by calling (309) 308-8150. They can direct you to the right resource for what you're experiencing.