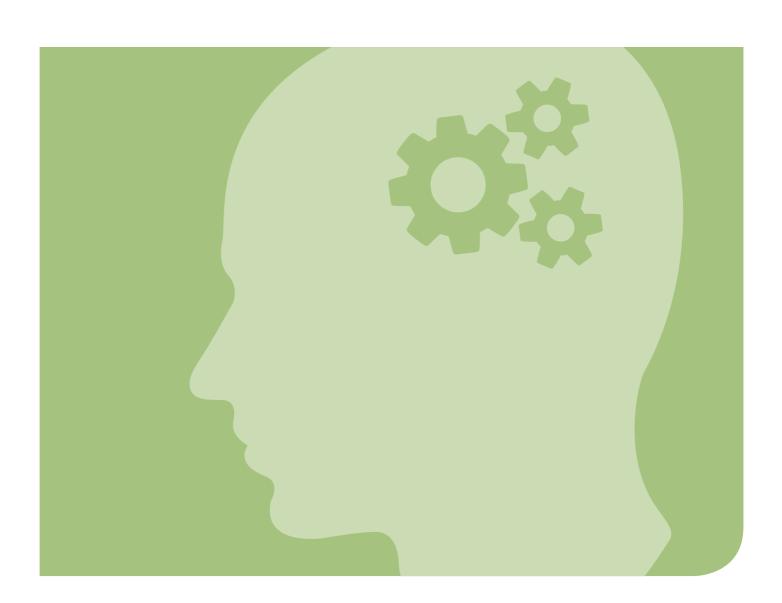# Switching off from social media

Social media is one of the most profound changes in our lives over the past twenty years. On the one hand, it can connect users and combat loneliness, but on the other, it's linked to mental health problems as people compare themselves to others online and spend more time on their phones than interacting with the world around them.

Westfield Health

How much time do you spend online?

Do you check your social media accounts every day? If so, you're in good company – according to research company Nielsen, 45% of the world's total population check in on their social accounts daily.

People are spending an average of 2 hours 23 minutes on social media, and 60% of those surveyed reported that they were constantly connected.

Facebook, Instagram and YouTube were the platforms with the largest dwell times, with 58, 53 and 40 minutes spent on average on each site respectively.

A survey conducted in 2019 by the American Psychiatric Association outlined our love-hate relationship with social media: 45% of participants recognised that social networks have both positive and negative effects on our mental health, while over a third of those surveyed believe it has a detrimental effect.

Scientific studies show that longer amounts of time spent on Facebook and the more often you check your account, is linked to higher levels of depression.

Check in with your feelings

If any of the above sounds familiar, it's time to take stock and think about how your use of social media is making you feel.

Start to notice how you feel when you are online: are there any triggers? What makes you feel good, and what kind of things make you feel bad? Do you compare yourself with other people?

Studies have shown that passive social media use can leader to higher instances of depression compared to active posting on social networks.

You may find that interacting with social media for short periods sits better with you than spending a long time scrolling through one particular network.

Towards taking a break

You may decide enough is enough and that you want to switch off from social media. There are a few ways to go about it:

- You could try cutting down first. Limit your use – reduce the time you're spending on social networks.

- Make it more manageable – go through your friends or followers and unfollow those you don't interact with, or those you might compare yourself unfavourably with. This could also apply to platforms you don't really interact with but find yourself scrolling through.

- Delete social media apps off your phone – that way, you're less likely to access them regularly

Digital detox

It's a good idea for your mental health to take regular breaks from social media. Whether you plan to take a day or a week off, or a longer period, reducing your use of Facebook has been shown to improve mental health.

A Danish study showed a causal link between taking a break from Facebook and feeling better about life. After a week away from Facebook, survey participants' life satisfaction increased and their emotions became more positive.

In fact, improvements in mood were the most pronounced for heavy Facebook users, those who used the network passively and participants who envied others online.

Choose real over virtual

One of the most important lessons of cutting down on or switching off from social media is the reminder to live life in reality and not digitally.

Freeing yourself of the regular pressure to scroll through other people's lives or to capture the perfect picture to share gifts you time back for living and helps you focus on the present.

Seeing people in real life satisfies the basic need for human connection. Professor Jelena Kecmanovic reminds us that social media can be a meaningful addition to real life but shouldn't be a replacement for meeting up with others in person.

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