



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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The Social Media Cleanse: Why it Might be Time for an Online Break

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Believe it or not, Facebook began its life as a college-only website for Ivy-League schools.

From these humble beginnings, it grew to include over 2 billion members across the globe, and now serves as the center of “social media.” But social media includes many websites--such as Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit--and as these types of websites expand in influence, many of their users are beginning to feel the anxiety that comes from being flooded with information at all times.

While social media can have numerous positive uses, such as networking, staying in touch, or meeting new social groups, it’s important to recognize how its ongoing use can also lead to some unhealthy results.

Negative Feelings – A January 2016 study presented in the Journal of Depression and Anxiety linked social media use and depression in young adults; likewise, other studies by institutions like the University of North Carolina and Kent State show a correlation between excessive social media use and feelings of depression and anxiety in some participants. While such studies are only correlational, the evidence suggests that for a segment of the population, social media heightens feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Misinformation – The human brain is an amazing thing, but it’s not quite perfect, as it lacks the ability to make informed decisions all the time. Most often, humans make decisions based on feeling, and social media tends to surround us with articles that make us feel something, regardless of whether the article is

factually correct. Unfortunately, anxiety and misinformation tend to go hand-in-hand, and too much social media, combined with a steady stream of questionable information, can lead to a new source of anxiety in our lives.

Loss of Productivity – If you have access to the internet at work, it’s likely that you’ve used it to put off having to write that report you’ve been dreading. While this situation is not unique, loss of productivity can extend beyond the workplace. How often have you neglected a hobby because you got lost in YouTube? How often have you found yourself seeing more of your friends on Facebook and less of them in real life? A 2016 Harris Poll showed that 72% of Americans experience loneliness, with 1/3rd saying that they experience it on a weekly basis. As use of social media rises, and people become more isolated, the risk of chronic loneliness – and the array of associated health issues – can increase.

Even if you don’t see yourself in this list, it might be time to take an honest inventory of how much time you spend on social media, and whether that’s time you might want to spend elsewhere. If you’re considering a social media cleanse, start by taking an inventory of what you value and determine where or if social media stands in that inventory.

Generally, making time to be away from all media is good practice for soothing general day-to-day anxiety, so it’s good practice to leave your phone at home while you take a long walk, or remove all electronics from the bedroom. If turning social media off for good is too much, consider cutting down your social media time to 2-3 days a week which can go a long way in helping you find more time in the day. You may also want to impose limits on social media, such as spending only 15 minutes a day on certain websites. If you want to cut down on your use but just can’t, you may want to consider a phone application that monitors your use, so that you aren’t alone in your struggle.

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