

Health Enews

Are You Addicted to Social Media?

While there is no official medical recognition of social media addiction as a disease or disorder, there has been much discussion and research related to the behaviors associated with heavy or excessive use of social media. Addiction usually refers to compulsive behavior that leads to negative effects. With most addictions, people feel compelled to do certain activities so often that they become a harmful habit, which then interferes with other important activities such as work or school. In that context, a social media addict could be considered someone with a compulsion to use social media to excess—constantly checking Facebook status updates or “stalking” people’s profiles for hours on end.

Researchers at Chicago University conducted an experiment in which they recorded the cravings of several hundred people for several weeks. The researchers discovered that social media cravings were stronger than the cravings for cigarettes and alcohol.

Harvard University researchers actually hooked people up to a MRI to scan their brains and see what happens when they talk about themselves, which is a key part of what people do in social media. Researchers found that self-disclosure communication stimulates the brain.



Additionally, studies have concluded that those who use social networks excessively may have a decrease in real life social community participation, a decrease in academic achievement, and relationship problems. In fact, plenty of clinicians have observed symptoms of anxiety, depression and some psychological disorders in people who spend too much time online.

How do you know if you are addicted to social media?

Norwegian researchers developed the *Bergan Facebook Addiction Scale* that may answer the question as to whether you are addicted to Facebook. Answer each question: very rarely, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often. Scoring often or very often on four of six questions suggests you have a Facebook addiction.

1. You spend a lot of time thinking about Facebook or planning how to use it.
2. You feel an urge to use Facebook more and more.
3. You use Facebook in order to forget about personal problems.
4. You have tried to cut down on the use of Facebook without success.
5. You have become restless or troubled if you are prohibited from using Facebook.
6. You use Facebook so much that it has had a negative impact on your job/studies.

How do you overcome your social media addiction?

1. Keep a social media journal. Set a virtual alarm on your smartphone or computer every time you log onto social media. When you stop, check the alarm and write down the amount of time you've spent on social media. Set a weekly limit (six hours would be plenty).
2. Try social media blocking software. Download and install one of the many software programs that block access to social media. *Self Control*, for example, is an application for Apple users that prevents access to email or particular websites for any amount of time you choose. Other apps to try include *ColdTurkey* and *Facebook Limiter*.
3. Get help from a friend or spouse. Ask someone you trust to set a new password for your social media account and promise to hide it for at least a week or two. This might be low-tech, but it's cheap, easy, and effective.
4. Deactivate social media. If none of the above tips help, temporarily suspend or deactivate your social media.
5. Delete social media. If all else fails, delete your accounts. Nobody will be notified and no one will be able to see your information anymore. Before deleting your accounts, decide if you'd like to save your profile info, posts, photo's and other items you've posted. Facebook gives you the option to download an archive. Go to *General Account Settings* page and click on *Download a copy of your Facebook data*.

Some may see deleting your social media accounts as the equivalent of social suicide, but that's a little melodramatic. Deleting social media may actually be a way to breathe new life into a "real" life.