

# Social Media's Influence on You & Your Health Journey

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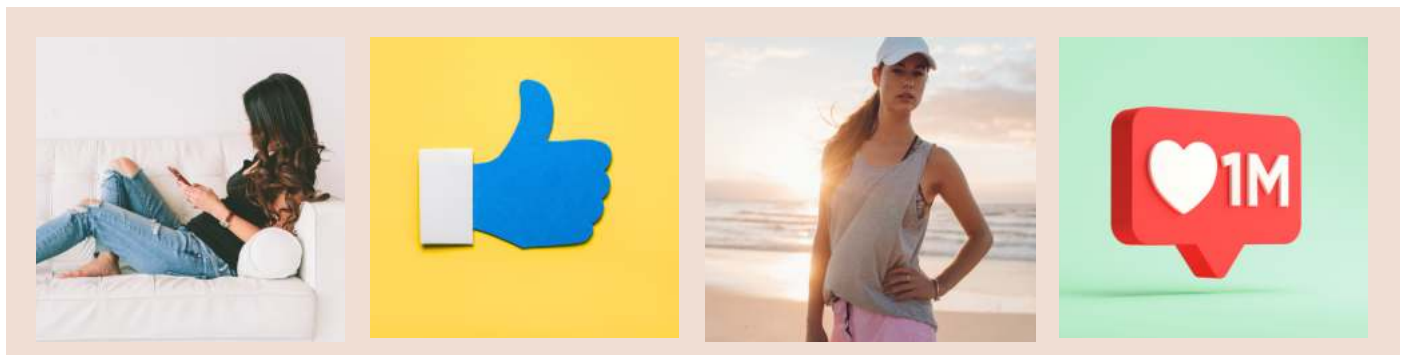


As you scroll through your newsfeed, do you feel inspired to change or demotivated? If you find yourself wishing your body looked like someone else's or that you had enough time and money to travel the world like your best friend, it may be time to analyze your relationship with social media.

Social media provides a glimpse into the lives of others. It's also become a hub for influencers, marketers, and internet-famous celebrities. These folks may have made social media their entire career, not just a way to share wholesome photos from their grandma's birthday party, although some do that too!

The problem with this perceived accessibility and relatability to the famous, along with filtered images and highlights of everyday people's lives, is that it can lead to unrealistic and potentially unhealthy expectations while on a health and wellness journey. Many people may instinctively think what they're seeing is the "norm" rather than a carefully crafted brand or image. One shocking example of this is the increase in people requesting plastic surgery to look like their filtered Snapchat and Instagram photos. No matter how much we as a society may advocate for not comparing ourselves to others, we may never be able to escape it due to what psychologists call "Social Comparison Theory." According to this theory, healthy or unhealthy levels of comparison depend on the person, the type of comparison, and the actions we take, whether productive or potentially damaging.

The same logic applies to our social media usage. Healthy social media usage utilizes it as a tool to connect with others, but it can become problematic when we use it passively by scrolling through our feeds and not interacting with content.





So, how can you navigate social media without getting sucked into counterproductive comparisons that can affect how you view yourself, your health journey, and in turn, your self-worth and self-esteem? Let's explore some strategies for navigating social media in your day-to-day life while improving your health.

## 1. Don't Let Curated Content Fool You

Make no mistake; when you are on a wellness journey, you'll likely be bombarded with health and wellness products and creators thanks to social media's algorithms. While social media sites have cracked down on some negative influences by providing the option to hide the number of likes on a post and creating rules such as not allowing paid marketers to use "before-and-after pictures" that depict people in a negative light, content like this can still end up on your feed through other avenues. This means that you'll have a lot of posts and bad actors to sort through, along with genuine and positive creators. For instance, a "bad" actor may promote a quick-fix diet pill, while a genuine and positive creator might share their journey to better health through sustainable lifestyle changes.

To tell the difference between good and bad content, ask yourself how simple, quick, or one-sided the practice or product seems. For example, while a supplement can provide support to help you reach your goals, more effort will be required to improve your health in the long run, such as adjusting what and how much you eat, drink, exercise, and check in with your healthcare team. And making these types of changes isn't always an easy feat! So, if something seems too good to be true, keep scrolling. Remember, just because you see a product or service on social media doesn't mean it's a high-quality brand. Always do your research and consult with your healthcare team for further guidance.

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## 2. Practice Self-Compassion

As you scroll through your feed, you'll likely see people who are the archetype of fitness. However, it's important to remember that many of these people may be making social media content as a part of their job or to gain exposure. When you encounter these images, practice self-compassion instead of falling into the negative comparison trap or degrading your body image. To do this, you'll need to understand three concepts outlined by the leading researcher in self-compassion, Dr. Kristin Neff: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

Common humanity is the understanding that many others share your experience. You are not alone in how you feel; what you're going through is a human experience shared by many. This means that the feelings of inadequacy or comparison you experience are not unique to you, and many others have similar struggles.

## 3. Digital Detoxes

You may seek a natural health professional to assist in detoxing your body, but what about detoxing your mind and spirit? A digital detox may be in order if you are negatively influenced by the images you see on your screen or spending more time on social media than you'd like. A few signs that you may need one include spending more hours on social media than face-to-face with friends, being distracted at work, and negatively comparing yourself to others. Loved ones may have also noticed and are urging you to slow down.

To do a digital detox, it's first important to analyze your social media usage and determine what steps you want to take to curb its negative effects. Set some goals and then let your family and friends know your plan, explaining that they can expect delayed responses from you. You can also plan to call or text them more frequently while making these changes, or better yet, meet for lunch! Lastly, evaluate how you feel after you stick to your plan and then consider implementing your positive results permanently.

## SOME WAYS YOU MAY WANT TO DIGITALLY DETOX INCLUDE:

- Device-free meals
- Not using your device before bedtime
- Getting rid of an app for a week
- Turning off notifications
- Downgrading to a phone that doesn't have apps
- Unfollowing and unfriending accounts that make you feel bad
- Giving yourself a finite amount of time per day online
- Committing to not scrolling and instead using social media as a way to post pictures and talk to others
- Putting your phone on silent in the evening or leaving it in a drawer
- Only logging in at certain times of the day and staying logged out until these times to avoid reflexively opening apps

Determine how long you'd like to detox from social media or digital devices. Start small by committing to a couple of days or a week. At first, it may feel jarring or boring, but later on, you may discover that you feel more grounded and at peace, able to concentrate, and in touch with yourself and your goals. The time you are away can also give you a platform to self-reflect and redefine your health goals to determine what makes sense for you.

Once you have a healthy relationship with social media, it can be an extremely beneficial health resource. With millions of users worldwide, you can find real people who have overcome similar health challenges to learn what works and what doesn't. In addition, online communities can be engaging accountability partners and provide motivational support. Social media also has a seemingly endless variety of exercise tips and meal prep ideas to fit different dietary needs and health goals. When following the right people, you can find fresh ways to keep yourself excited about your health journey.





## Conclusion:

No one is perfect, not even celebrities or influencers creating inspiring or positive content. But social media won't always show you that because these platforms tend to contain only the best, most thrilling, and most attractive aspects of people's lives. Using social media while on a health journey means you'll need to become more in tune with yourself and your goals and set realistic expectations. To start doing that, we recommend understanding the power of curated content, practicing self-compassion, and trying a digital detox to determine what's truly healthy for you mentally, physically, and spiritually.

You may seek a natural health professional to assist in detoxing your body, but what about detoxing your mind and spirit? A digital detox may be in order if you are negatively influenced by the images you see on your screen or spending more time on social media than you'd like. A few signs that you may need one include spending more hours on social media than face-to-face with friends, being distracted at work, and negatively comparing yourself to others. Loved ones may have also noticed and are urging you to slow down. To do a digital detox, it's first important to analyze your social media usage and determine what steps you want to take to curb its negative effects. Set some goals and then let your family and friends know your plan, explaining that they can expect delayed responses from you. You can also plan to call or text them more frequently while making these changes, or better yet, meet for lunch! Lastly, evaluate how you feel after you stick to your plan and then consider implementing your positive results permanently.

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