Social Media and Your Mental Health

Social media can be great for connecting with family and friends. It can also help us find out about news, events, arts, and culture. But studies show that it's not very good for our self-esteem, mental health, or satisfaction with our lives. They call it "doomscrolling" for a reason, after all.

The more you use social media, the more likely you are to have:

- Anxiety

- Depression

- Loneliness

- Addictive patterns

- Lower self-esteem

- Trouble with sleep

Spending too much time on social media can cause you to fall behind in work, school, and exercise. And it can limit how much you keep up with relationships in person. Lacking in these areas can impact your mental health, too.

Let's look at how and why social media affects our mental health.

The problem with comparing

It's natural to compare yourself to the people you see around you. But social media lets you compare yourself to others constantly, even when no one else is around.

Social media shows you an overly polished, happy, and positive picture of someone's life. For instance, they might use filters on their photos to make themselves and their surroundings look perfect. When you compare these images to your day-to-day life, it can make you feel bad. But remember, you're comparing your real life to someone else's highlight reel.

You might also compare your number of online friends or followers to others or how many "likes" or comments you get on a post.

The more time you spend on social media, the more you compare yourself to others. This can lead to lower self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and a sense of dissatisfaction with your life.

Looking for a "like"

Social media is designed to keep you on it for as long as possible. When you get a "like" on a post, your brain releases the hormone dopamine. This chemical makes you feel good. It's the same chemical that gets released when we eat something delicious, have sex, or go shopping. When we get dopamine from something, we want more of that thing.

You might make a post on social media when you want to connect with others or boost your self-esteem. If you get a lot of likes and comments, it can feel wonderful. But if you don't get the response you were hoping for, your self-esteem and mood can crash.

Hurting real-life interactions

Research shows that in-person relationships get worse the more you use your phone. This could be because you think you're meeting your social needs by using social media, so you don't try to see your friends.

But looking at someone online doesn't satisfy our need for face-to-face human interaction. We end up feeling more isolated than before.

The FOMO problem

FOMO means fear of missing out. This term can apply when you see people doing something online and you feel left out. You might wish you had similar events to go to. Or you can feel you're missing out on the type of life you want to have.

These feelings can make you lonely, depressed, and anxious. They can even disrupt your sleep and affect your memory, digestion, and performance at work or school.

Protecting your mental health

The good news is that you don't have to completely give up social media to improve your mental health. Here are some tips on how to reduce its negative effects:

- If you notice that certain profiles make you feel anxious, lonely, or depressed, stop following them.

- Remember that what you see about other people and their lives might not be accurate.

- Limit your time on social media platforms. Research shows that the more time you spend on them, the more your chance for mental health issues increases. You can set timers for how long you'd like to be on social media. Some phones have settings that will switch off the internet or apps when you've reached your time limit.

- Take a social media break every so often. Staying off social media for a day, a weekend, or however long you decide can offer you a fresh perspective. It can give your brain a rest and help you be more present in your life .

- Think about the type of social media platforms you use. The more visual platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok tend to make users feel worse.

At the end of the day, what's important is that you use social media in a way that makes you feel good, not stressed. And when you need to, it's more than OK to take a break and enjoy the world beyond the screen.