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Confused world, confused minds:

Mental health today

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Mental Health and Wellbeing Risks from Rising Digital and Social Media Use



by Milisa Lekbir

In today's world of remote learning, online work, and constant social media use, many of us—especially young people—are spending more time on screens than ever before. The pandemic only made this worse, blending school, work, and rest into one long digital blur. What we often don't realize is how this leads to digital burnout—a kind of deep exhaustion and lack of motivation caused by constant screen use.

What Is Digital Burnout?

Digital burnout affects students and young professionals alike. It's the tiredness and disconnection that follows long hours on devices—whether for work, study, or scrolling. Studies show 70% of workers feel burned out sometimes, and over 80% of remote workers show signs of it. Gen Z is said to be the most disengaged, and burnout can lead to lower productivity, mental health issues, and even people leaving their jobs. The key is recognizing it early and taking steps to manage it.





How Social Media Affects the Brain

Social media fragments our focus with constant notifications and distractions, making it harder to concentrate. Studies show heavy users often struggle with tasks that require long attention spans.

It also affects our brain's reward system by triggering dopamine every time we get a like or comment, creating a cycle of instant gratification and dependence. This can make us anxious or low when we don't get digital feedback.

Even our memories are affected—sharing things in real time can reduce how well we remember the moment. Waiting until after the experience helps us stay present and recall it better.

Most importantly, social media is linked to lower self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Comparing ourselves to others or seeking constant validation can harm our mental well-being. Setting boundaries—like turning off notifications or limiting screen time—can help restore balance and protect our mental health.

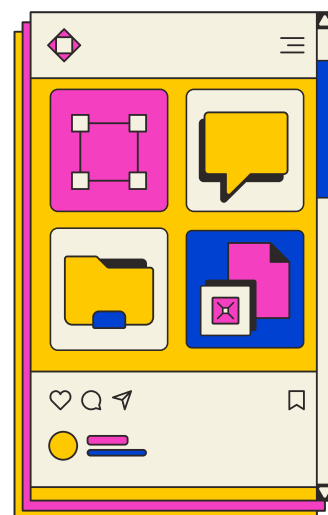
What Is Toxic Positivity and Why It's a Problem

Toxic positivity is when people insist you should “stay positive” no matter what, saying things like “just be happy” or “look on the bright side” even during tough times. This attitude ignores real emotions and can make people feel wrong for feeling sad, angry, or overwhelmed, which only adds stress.

On social media, there's often pressure to appear happy all the time, even when things aren't okay. But it's perfectly normal to experience ups and downs. Being honest about our feelings helps us cope better and take care of our mental health in a healthy way.

How Social Media Amplifies Toxic Positivity and Affects Our Mental Health

Toxic positivity and social media are deeply interconnected, often in ways that quietly harm our mental health. On platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook, we're constantly exposed to a stream of curated, idealized content—highlight reels of people's lives that showcase endless happiness, success, and motivation.





On social media, people often feel obligated to post only the good parts of their lives and suppress anything that might seem “negative” or vulnerable. Over time, this promotes the belief that being sad, anxious, or angry isn’t normal or welcome. As a result, we may internalize this pressure, telling ourselves to “stay strong,” “just smile,” or “be grateful,” even when we’re experiencing deep emotional distress. This is the essence of toxic positivity—and it thrives online.

Moreover, when users share their hardships honestly, they’re sometimes met with oversimplified comments like “just think positive” or “everything happens for a reason.” While these responses may be well-meaning, they can invalidate the person’s real pain and shut down meaningful conversation. This can lead to feelings of isolation and shame, reinforcing the idea that struggling emotionally is a personal failure rather than a human experience.

In essence, social media amplifies toxic positivity by rewarding surface-level optimism and filtering out emotional honesty. To combat this, it’s important to be mindful of what we consume and share online. Following accounts that promote emotional authenticity, mental health education, and vulnerability can help shift the culture toward one that embraces the full range of human emotions—not just the pretty ones.

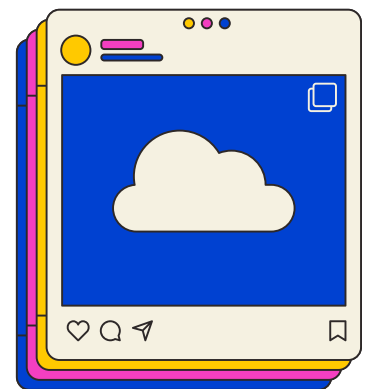


How to Use Social Media Without Losing Your Mind

Over the past two decades, social media has become deeply embedded in daily life for billions of people, evolving from a simple tool to stay connected into a powerful platform for news, entertainment, self-expression, and work. With smartphones and tablets always within reach, many users find themselves checking social media constantly, often without even realizing it. This constant digital engagement blurs the lines between public and private life, rest and activity, and our online and offline selves.

Research shows that excessive social media use can seriously impact mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and reduced life satisfaction, especially among young people. Some users even experience withdrawal-like symptoms when trying to cut back, signaling addictive patterns. Beyond addiction, heavy social media use can disrupt sleep, affect work or school performance, and weaken real-world relationships. The design of platforms—with notifications, likes, and personalized content—aims to capture and hold attention, making it tough to stop scrolling.

To foster a healthier balance, mental health and digital wellness experts recommend using social media with intention and setting clear boundaries. Mindfulness is key: recognizing emotional triggers that prompt social media use can help individuals make more conscious choices. Rather than avoiding social media entirely, the goal is to cultivate a purposeful relationship with technology that supports mental well-being.



Practical solutions include:

- Set clear personal goals for social media use (e.g., staying informed, connecting with friends, creative expression).
- Designate specific “offline hours” during the day to unplug.
- Use app blockers or remove social media apps from the home screen to reduce temptation.
- Create tech-free zones in your home, like bedrooms or dining areas, to encourage rest and meaningful interaction.
- Turn off push notifications to minimize distractions.
- Use screen time tracking tools to monitor and manage daily usage.



Problemi mentalnog zdravlja

by Borna Tkalčević

Što je mentalna bolest ili mentalni poremećaj?

Mentalna bolest ili mentalni poremećaj odnosi se na dijagnosticirano stanje (npr. depresija, poremećaj hiperaktivnosti s pozornosti, bipolarni poremećaj, ovisnosti ili shizofrenija) koje može zahtijevati medicinsku pomoć. Točan uzrok mnogih mentalnih bolesti nije poznat, ali trenutne teorije sugeriraju da su neki poremećaji povezani s kemijom u mozgu. Postoje brojni čimbenici koji mogu igrati ulogu u nastanku ili okidaču mentalnih bolesti, uključujući genetske faktore, poput prisutnosti ozbiljne mentalne bolesti kod roditelja ili bližnjih srodnika, te stres, koji može izazvati ili pogoršati stanje.

Uobičajeni problemi mentalnog zdravlja kod djece i mladih uključuju:

- Anksioznost i opsesivno-kompulzivni poremećaj
- Zlostavljanje i fizičko nasilje u školama
- Istovremeni poremećaji
- Poremećaje u prehrani i slike o tijelu
- Poremećaje raspoloženja (depresija)
- Zlouporabu supstanci i ovisnosti



Ovaj put ćemo se fokusirati na anksioznost i poremećaje raspoloženja poput depresije.

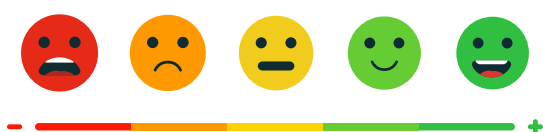


Što je anksioznost i kako se s njom nositi?

Anksioznost je osjećaj zabrinutosti, straha ili nervoze i predstavlja normalnu ljudsku reakciju na stresne ili nove situacije. Međutim, kada ti osjećaji postanu gotovo stalni i ometaju svakodnevni život, tada govorimo o poremećaju anksioznosti.

Razlozi nastanka anksioznosti mogu uključivati:

- Nasljednu sklonost
- Sramežljivost
- Nepredvidiv način života
- Stresne događaje



Simptomi anksioznosti uključuju:

- Zabrinutost ili panika
- Pojedinačno plakanje
- Izbjegavanje ili povlačenje iz društva
- Prilaženje ili držanje za druge
- Strah od odvajanja
- Problemi sa spavanjem
- Fizičke simptome (bolovi, nelagoda)
- Ljutnja ili razdražljivost

Depresija kod mladih i odraslih: razlike, uzroci i kako potražiti pomoć

Depresija je ozbiljno mentalno stanje koje utječe na osjećaje, razmišljanje i svakodnevno funkcioniranje. Može pogoditi bilo koga – tinejdžere i odrasle – ali se kod svake skupine očituje na različite načine.

Što je depresija?

Depresija nije samo prolazna tuga ili loš dan. To je stanje koje traje dulje od dva tjedna i uključuje stalni osjećaj tuge, beznada, gubitak interesa za stvari koje su prije veselile, umor, promjene u apetitu, probleme sa spavanjem i koncentracijom.

Kako dolazi do depresije?

- Uzroci su različiti i mogu uključivati:
- Genetske predispozicije (obiteljska povijest depresije)
- Hormonalne promjene (posebno u adolescenciji i kod žena)
- Stresne životne okolnosti (gubitak, nasilje, razvod, siromaštvo)
- Društveni pritisci i nerealna očekivanja (posebno kod mladih)
- Zloupotreba alkohola ili droga
- Razlika između tinejdžerske i odrasle depresije



Kod tinejdžera:

- Često se maskira razdražljivošću, ljutnjom ili povlačenjem
- Problemi u školi, društvenim odnosima i promjene ponašanja su češći znakovi
- Ne izražavaju uvijek otvoreno tugu

Kod odraslih:

- Češće se javlja kronični umor, osjećaj besmisla i manjak energije
- Teže se odlučuju potražiti pomoć zbog osjećaja srama ili stigme
- Depresija može biti povezana s problemima na poslu, u braku ili financijama

Kako si pomoći?

Prihvati da trebaš pomoć – depresija nije slabost, već bolest koju treba liječiti. Razgovaraj – s obitelji, prijateljima ili stručnjakom.

Pobrini se za tijelo – redovito kretanje, prehrana i san pomažu u ublažavanju simptoma.

Izbjegavaj izolaciju – iako je teško, pokušaj ostati povezan s ljudima.

Kako i gdje potražiti pomoć u Hrvatskoj?

U Hrvatskoj postoji nekoliko besplatnih i anonimnih izvora pomoći:

Plavi telefon – za djecu i mlade: ☎ 116 111 (besplatno, anonimno)

Hrabri telefon – ☎ 0800 0800

Centri za mentalno zdravlje – djeluju pri domovima zdravlja

Psihološko savjetovanje pri fakultetima – dostupno studentima

Hitna pomoć – ako je stanje hitno: ☎ 194

Centar za krizna stanja Zagreb – dostupno 0–24, ☎ 01 2376 335

Obiteljski liječnik – prvi korak prema stručnoj pomoći

Anksioznost i depresija ne biraju godine. Iako se različito izražava kod mladih i odraslih, jednako je ozbiljna. Važno je na vrijeme prepoznati znakove i znati da postoji pomoć – odmah, besplatno i anonimno. Najvažnija poruka: Nisi sam/a. Pomoć postoji i zaslužuješ ju.



Interview with a Therapist

by Borna Tkalčević

Borna Tkalcevic: Dr. Russet, thank you for joining us today to discuss anxiety in adolescents and adults. Can you start by telling us a bit about what anxiety is and how it affects individuals?

Psychologist Dr Russet: Absolutely. Anxiety is a normal human emotion characterized by feelings of worry, nervousness, and fear that are persistent and overwhelming. It can affect anyone, regardless of age, and can manifest differently in adolescents and adults. Anxiety can impact daily life, relationships and overall well-being.

Borna Tkalcevic: That's really helpful. What are some common signs and symptoms of anxiety in adolescents and adults?

Psychologist Dr. Russet: In adolescents, anxiety might manifest as excessive worrying, fear of social situations, or physical symptoms like stomachaches or headaches. In adults, anxiety can cause feelings of restlessness, irritability, or an intense fear of specific situations or objects. Physical symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, sweating, or trembling and pain in chest.

Borna Tkalcevic: How can individuals manage anxiety, and what treatment options are available?





Psychologist Dr.Russet: There are several effective ways to manage anxiety. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a helpful approach that teaches individuals to identify and challenge negative thought patterns. Relaxation techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or mindfulness meditation can also reduce anxiety symptoms. In some cases, medication may be prescribed. Lifestyle changes, such as regular exercise, healthy eating and sufficient sleep, can also help alleviate anxiety.

Borna Tkalcevic: What advice would you give to individuals experiencing anxiety, and how can they seek help?

Psychologist Dr.Russet: My advice would be to acknowledge and accept your feelings, rather than trying to suppress or deny them. Seek help from a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or therapist, who can provide guidance and support. Support groups or online resources can also be beneficial. Remember, anxiety is treatable and seeking help is the first step towards feeling better.

Borna Tkalcevic: Thank you, Dr. Russet for sharing your expertise with us today. Your insights are invaluable for anyone struggling with anxiety.

Connection between nutrition and mental health

by Milisa Lekbir

Throughout history, we haven't completely understood the relationship between diet and mental health in the Western world. Some people have suspected a connection between nutrition and health (both mental and physical) based on observation. However, we did not have the scientific evidence to support it.

Today, modern scientific research is clarifying this food-mood connection. There is growing evidence that diet and mental illness are closely linked. Improving your nutrition can directly affect mental health symptoms and improve overall mental wellness.

While you can't cure depression with a healthy meal, making healthy eating choices can help improve many mental illness symptoms.

Food Is Your Body's Fuel

We often think of food in terms of physical health, but it also plays a crucial role in mental well-being. Your brain, immune, endocrine, and nervous systems—all connected to mental health—rely on proper nutrition to regulate stress, mood, and sleep.

Humans can draw nutrients from a wide range of foods, including:

Whole and raw foods

Cooked and fermented foods

Minimally processed foods (like natural peanut butter)

Ultra-processed foods (like fast food or chips)

But just because the body can use these foods doesn't mean it thrives on all of them. Your body needs a balance of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fats, carbs, water, and protein. These nutrients support everything from hormone production to cell repair. Without them, the body conserves energy by focusing on survival—often at the cost of your mental clarity, mood, and energy levels.



How Food Affects Your Mood and Brain

Your brain and body need the right nutrients to feel good and function well. One important brain chemical is serotonin, often called the “feel-good” hormone. It helps control your mood, sleep, appetite, and how you deal with pain. To make serotonin, your body needs nutrients like vitamin B1, calcium, copper, and riboflavin. If you're not getting enough, your body has to choose where to send those nutrients—and your mood may suffer.

Your nervous system (your brain, spinal cord, and nerves) also depends on food. It sends messages all over your body. For this system to work well, your brain needs to stay flexible and grow new connections—a process called neuroplasticity. Without the right amino acids, minerals, healthy fats, and carbs, the brain can't work properly.

When your nervous system isn't healthy, it can make mental health problems worse—like anxiety, depression, ADHD, OCD, and more.

Some nutrients are especially helpful. For example, omega-3 fatty acids (found in salmon, sardines, walnuts, chia, and flax seeds) can lower brain inflammation and support mental health. They're also used in treating diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

So, the food you eat plays a big role in your mental health. Getting the right balance of nutrients helps your brain handle stress, regulate mood, and stay sharp. Eating well really is part of feeling well.





Gut Microbiome and Mental Health

Your gut is home to billions of good bacteria, known as the microbiome, which help your body in surprising ways—including your mental health. These bacteria can produce vitamins like B1 and even neurotransmitters like serotonin, which boosts mood.

The gut and brain are in constant communication. What you eat affects your gut, and in turn, your gut affects how you feel. While researchers are still learning about this connection, studies show that a healthy, diverse gut microbiome is linked to better mood and fewer signs of anxiety or depression—especially in young children.

One study found that pregnant women with more diverse gut bacteria had toddlers who were less anxious or withdrawn. Another study showed that improving gut health can help people with mood disorders feel better. So how do you feed your gut? Good bacteria love fiber—especially from foods like broccoli stems, leafy greens, beans, fruit peels, and seeds. A healthy, diverse microbiome helps protect your mental health, while a poor one can cause inflammation and make things worse.



Inflammation and Your Brain

Inflammation is the body's natural way of fighting off threats, like infections. But some foods—especially those high in sugar, saturated fat, and artificial additives—can cause too much inflammation, which isn't good for your brain. Recent studies show that eating a lot of ultra-processed food may lead to brain problems, like trouble thinking clearly or feeling more stressed or anxious. That's because inflammation can affect important parts of the brain like:

The hippocampus, which helps manage stress by producing feel-good chemicals like dopamine.

Or the amygdala, which controls your fight-or-flight response through stress hormones.

Researchers have known for a while that too much inflammation raises the risk of diseases like diabetes and heart problems. Now they're finding that it can also mess with your mental health.

So, eating less processed food and more whole, natural foods isn't just good for your body—it helps your brain, too.



How Malnutrition Affects Your Mind and Body

Malnutrition happens when your body doesn't get the right balance of nutrients. This can be from not eating enough (undernutrition) or eating too much unhealthy food (overnutrition). Both can hurt your body and your mental health.

Your brain needs energy from food (like carbs and fats) to think clearly and stay focused. It also needs protein to make brain chemicals that help with mood. Without enough of these, you might feel tired, sad, anxious, or have trouble thinking straight.

Signs of malnutrition can include:

Undernutrition: weight loss, dry skin, tiredness, weak muscles

Overnutrition: weight gain, high blood pressure, and health problems like diabetes

Kids and older people are more at risk—kids because they're growing fast, and older adults because they may eat less or not absorb nutrients well.

In hospitals, more than 1 in 3 patients are malnourished, which can lead to longer hospital stays and worse health outcomes.

Malnutrition is often linked to poverty and food insecurity—when people don't have enough healthy food. This can cause stress, anxiety, and depression.

To stay healthy, it's important to eat a balanced diet with enough protein, calories, vitamins, and minerals. If you're not sure what your body needs, ask a doctor or nutritionist for help.





Uspjeh i kako ga prepoznati

by Mladena Štih



Hrvatski jezični portal definira uspjeh kao dostignuće cilja; povoljan ishod čega i kao postizanje bogatstva, slave ili položaja.

Osjećaj uspješnosti subjektivan je doživljaj sreće, vlastite vrijednosti, ispunjenosti i zadovoljstva postignutim ciljevima. Kako sami definiramo uspjeh ovisi o našim vrijednostima, osobnosti, stvarima koje nas pokreću i ciljevima kojima težimo. Istina, druga definicija najčešći je sinonim za uspjeh, ali većina nas uspješna je i prije nego je postigla bilo koji od tri navedena koncepta.

U mladosti, uspjeh se mjeri kroz postizanje dobrih rezultata u školi, izvanškolskim i sportskim aktivnostima, ali i kroz osobni razvoj i stvaranje socijalnih veza. Osobito je to izraženo sada, kada je mladima broj pratitelja na njihovim društvenim mrežama mjerilo uspjeha.

Nakon završenog školovanja uspješni se možemo smatrati ukoliko smo postigli planiranu razinu obrazovanja i tako napravili temelj za početak nove faze života: razvoj karijere, zasnivanje obitelji i donošenje značajnih životnih odluka.

Sljedeća životna faza je možda i najteža, ali i prepuna uspjeha. Ovdje smo fokusirani na karijeru i postizanje financijske stabilnosti, podizanje obitelji i na uspostavljanje ravnoteže između poslovnog i privatnog. U ovom životnom razdoblju uspjehom se može smatrati napredovanje na poslu, ali i osjećaj zadovoljstva na radnom mjestu. Uspjeh je skladna veza, sretna samoća ili kuća puna zdrave i sretne djece.

U srednjoj i starijoj dobi uspješni smo ako smanjimo količinu stresa, uživamo više u aktivnostima koje nas ispunjavaju, u krugu prijatelja ili obitelji. Uspjeh je široki krug prijatelja i poznanika ili mali broj dragih ljudi na koje se možemo osloniti. Uspješni smo ukoliko smo našli životni smisao i zadovoljstvo.

Kako možemo prepoznati uspješnu osobu?

1. Uspješna osoba postavlja jasne ciljeve i dosljedna je u njihovom postizanju. Svaki mali ostvareni cilj korak je više prema zadanom krajnjem cilju.
2. Uspješna osoba svjesna je svojih sposobnosti, hrabro se nosi sa izazovima i ne boji se krenuti prema nečem novom, nesigurnom, neistraženom.
3. Uspješna osoba radi na sebi, kontinuirano razvija svoja znanja i vještine i pozitivno utječe na rast i razvoj drugih u svojoj okolini.

Svaki pojedinac kroči jedinstvenom stazom osobno definiranog uspjeha. Ponekad je ta staza uska i vijugava, nekad široka i ravna, a ponekad važnija od samog cilja prema kojem nas vodi jer nas izgrađuje, oblikuje i uči. Koračajte tom stazom hrabro i odlučno.

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