

# Health Insights

December 2023

## Social Media and Your Wellbeing

Pausing on social media for just one week could lead to significant improvements in your wellbeing, depression, and anxiety and could be recommended in the future as a way to help people manage their mental health, say the authors of a new study.

The study, carried out by a team of researchers at the University of Bath (UK), studied the mental health effects of a week-long social media break. For some participants in the study, this freed up around nine hours of their week which would otherwise have been spent scrolling Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok. Their results (published in the US journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*) suggest that just one week off social media improved individuals' overall level of well-being while reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

For the study, the researchers randomly allocated 154 individuals aged 18 to 72 who used social media every day into either an intervention group, where they were asked to stop using all social media for one-week or a control group, where they could continue scrolling as normal. At the beginning of the study, baseline scores for anxiety, depression and wellbeing were taken.

Participants reported spending an average of 8 hours per week on social media at the start of the study. One week later, the participants who were asked to take the one-week break had significant improvements

in wellbeing, depression, and anxiety than those who continued to use social media, suggesting a short-term benefit. Participants also reported a reduction of social media usage—an average of 21 minutes, compared to an average of seven hours. Screen usage statistics were provided to check that individuals had adhered to the break.

Dr. Jeff Lambert, lead researcher from Bath's Department for Health, explains: "Scrolling social media is so ubiquitous that many of us do it almost without thinking from the moment we wake up to when we close our eyes at night. We know that social media usage is huge and that there are increasing concerns about its mental health effects, so with this study, we wanted to see whether simply asking people to take a week's break could yield mental health benefits. Many of our participants reported positive effects from being off social media with improved mood and less anxiety overall. This suggests that even just a small break can have an impact."

Feeling 'low' and losing pleasure are core characteristics of depression, whereas anxiety is characterized by excessive and out of control worry. Wellbeing refers to an individual's level of positive affect, life satisfaction and sense of purpose. According to the Mind<sup>1</sup>, one in six of us experience a common mental health problem like anxiety and depression in any given week.

Jeffrey Lambert, George Barnstable, Eleanor Minter, Jemima Cooper, Desmond McEwan. Taking a One-Week Break from Social Media Improves Well-Being, Depression, and Anxiety: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 2022; DOI: [10.1089/cyber.2021.0324](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2021.0324)

<sup>1</sup>The Mind, a non-profit organization in the UK focusing on mental health resources and government policy

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## Creating Healthy Social Boundaries

It's important to take care of your social health throughout the year, and especially during the holiday season! Understanding how to set personal limits is essential for your social health and can help you build and maintain your relationships.

When setting personal limits, it can be difficult to understand what boundaries are and how to set them with others. Social boundaries help us to avoid feelings of resentment, disappointment, and anger that can occur when limits have been pushed too far.

### Setting healthy boundaries helps you to:

- Share personal information appropriately (not too much or too little)
- Identify and communicate your personal needs and wants
- Value your own opinions
- Say “no,” and accept when others tell you “no”

If you're not sure how to create or uphold healthy social boundaries, follow the tips below:

1. Be consistent with your boundaries. If you let boundaries slide, it could lead to confusion, or it can encourage new expectations in your relationship dynamic. Try to keep things consistent and steady.
2. Make time for yourself. Consider setting aside an hour or two each week for yourself. This helps you to reconnect with yourself and keep yourself accountable to goals or personal aspirations.
3. Communicate with others. Ensure you express when your boundaries have been crossed. This will help you to have healthy conversations about any concerns you may have and avoid confrontation.

Source: Pattermore, C. (2021, June 3). 10 ways to build and preserve better boundaries. Psych Central.  
<https://psychcentral.com/lib/10-way-to-build-and-preserve-better-boundaries>

# Mental Health Moment

## Preventing Holiday Burnout

According to research, nearly half of employees are burnt out at work. The World Health Organization defines burnout as “a syndrome resulting from workplace stress that has not been adequately managed.” Everyday life is hectic enough without the added stress of attending celebrations, coordinating gift-giving, planning finances, and balancing various family obligations during the holiday season. Even though levels of burnout are high, there are ways to help avoid burnout and manage your stress so you can enjoy your holiday season.

### Set Realistic Expectations

It's impossible to do everything. When the holidays hit, there are a lot of moving pieces to consider for a successful holiday season. Setting realistic expectations is crucial so you don't overcommit to tasks.

### Start Early

Spreading out your tasks and starting early will help with stress levels, as it removes the last-minute rush. Consider the following ways to prepare ahead of time:

- Send digital invitations for parties or hosted events at least two weeks in advance.
- Make necessary purchases a few weeks in advance.
- Decorate a few days before any hosted events.
- Arrange food plans, such as who's bringing certain dishes to share, at least one week in advance.

### Take Time to Recharge

It's essential to make time for activities that refuel you, such as reading, spending time with friends and going on outdoor walks. Taking time for yourself creates a balanced schedule by focusing on more than just work and the holidays.



## December Quiz

# Simple Vegetable Soup

### Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 2 large carrots, chopped
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 8 oz canned diced tomatoes
- 60 oz vegetable broth, low-sodium
- 3 medium potatoes, diced
- 1 cup green beans, chopped
- 3 bay leaves
- 2 tsp salt, or to taste
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 cup frozen sweet corn
- 1 cup frozen sweet peas
- ½ cup green onions, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped

### Instructions:

1. Preheat a heavy soup pot or Dutch oven over medium heat and add 2 Tbsp olive oil. Add chopped onions and carrots and sauté for 6-8 minutes, stirring occasionally until golden.
2. Add celery, canned tomatoes (with juice), broth, potatoes, green beans, bay leaves, salt, and pepper. Bring it to a boil then reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 25 minutes.
3. Once the vegetables are tender, add corn, sweet peas, green onion, and parsley. Season with salt to taste and simmer for another 5-8 minutes. Remove from heat and serve warm.

Calories: 167kcal, Carbohydrates: 30g, Protein: 5g, Fat: 4g

Drozhdzin, N. (2021, August 15). Easy vegetable soup recipe. NatashasKitchen.com. <https://natashaskitchen.com/easy-vegetable-soup-recipe/>

1. What benefits did participants in the intervention group see after the social media break?
  - a. Lessened anxiety and depression
  - b. Increased phone battery life
  - c. Decrease in wellbeing

### 2. Fill In the Blank:

Many of our participants reported positive effects from being off social media with improved \_\_\_\_\_ and less \_\_\_\_\_ overall.

### Creating Healthy Social Boundaries

3. Which of these is NOT a benefit of healthy social boundaries?
  - a. Saying and accepting "no"
  - b. Understand your personal needs
  - c. Avoid others at any cost
4. How can you create healthy social boundaries?
  - a. Communicate with others
  - b. Be consistent with boundaries
  - c. All the above

### Mental Health Moment

5. What does the WHO define burnout as?
  - a. A result of workplace stress that is adequately managed.
  - b. A syndrome resulting from workplace stress that has not been adequately managed.
  - c. A state of exhaustion due to excessive holiday celebrations.

See page 5 for quiz answers.



# Healthy Habits Calendar



## December 2023 – Social Media and Your Wellbeing

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 <b>Welcome to December!</b> Happy Holidays!	2 <b>Start the Servin' USA Challenge</b>
3	4	5 <b>Tuesday's Tip:</b> Remember to drink water during the winter season.	6	7 <b>Super Thursday:</b> Try to get at least 15 minutes of exercise.	8	9 <b>Service Saturday:</b> Set a goal to serve 5 people this month.
10 <b>Self-Care Sunday:</b> Prepare for work tomorrow by setting out your work clothes today.	11	12	13 <b>Worry-Free Wednesday:</b> Practice Mindfulness for 10 minutes today to relieve stress.	14	15 <b>Challenge Check-In:</b> How have you served your community so far this month?	16
17	18 <b>Meatless Monday:</b> Prepare one meal today without any meat.	19 <b>Tasty Tuesday:</b> Avoid eating out today.	20	21	22 <b>Fitness Friday:</b> Exercise for 15 minutes to prepare for the weekend.	23
24	25 Christmas	26	27	28 <b>Thursday's Tip:</b> Connect with someone you haven't spoken with in a while.	29	30
31						

# Servin' USA

For this challenge, you are invited to do activities that can make your community a better place. Service can provide a sense of purpose, create and strengthen relationships, and even help others to pay it forward! Some of these activities involve serving others, while others focus on serving the environment.

Below are 30 service-oriented projects. Over the next 30 days, choose 15 of the projects listed below to complete. Check off each project as you complete them.

- Clean up garbage on your street, neighborhood, or local park.
- Check in with an elderly relative.
- Put together a care package for someone who is sick.
- Offer to help a friend or coworker with a project they're working on.
- Gather spare, unused hygiene products to donate to a local homeless shelter.
- Collect and donate gently used clothing.
- Plant something in your home, school, or community garden.
- Write a thank you note to someone that you know.
- Find a place in your community to volunteer for an afternoon.
- Offer to help a neighbor with a task.
- Gather old blankets and towels to give to your local animal shelter.
- Make a short video to share on social media about an issue that's important to you.
- Research charities to find one that you'd like to support.
- Help clean a relative's home.
- Clean up at the local cemetery and place flowers on gravestones.
- Bring lunch for a friend or coworker.
- Volunteer at a youth shelter.
- Volunteer at a local, national, or state park.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or food bank.
- Donate gently used books to your local library.
- Recycle plastic bags, cans, and other recyclable material.
- Donate blood, or volunteer to help at a blood drive or similar event.
- Organize a carpool to reduce emissions.
- Plant a tree.
- Share one of your talents with someone else.
- Pay it forward in the drive-thru line.
- Get CPR certified.
- Build bird houses and place them around your home or neighborhood.
- Participate in a charity run or walk.
- Practice random acts of kindness.

## Answers to Quiz:

Q1: a. Lessened anxiety and depression | Q2: mood, anxiety

Q3: Avoid others at any cost | Q4: All of the above

Q5: A syndrome resulting from workplace stress that has not been adequately managed.