Doomscrolling: It's Not Good

When it comes to keeping up with what’s going on in the world, there’s no question that social media feeds have made it easier. But all this simple scrolling can come at a cost, especially when it seems the news is all bad.

As days go by, that idle and absent-minded scrolling can negatively impact your mental and even physical health. It’s why the habit has recently gained the trending moniker, “doomscrolling.”

What is doomscrolling?

“Doomscrolling is using social media, news apps, or other digital means to search for or consume negative news, disturbing news or anything with a negative spin,” says Felicia Gould, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the University of Miami Health System. “Since the outset of the pandemic, the availability of this kind of news has exploded. With rising death tolls, damages to the economy, job losses, family hardships, and racial discrimination dominating recent headlines, doom and gloom are easily accessible.”

Doomscrolling can take its toll on almost anyone’s mental health.

If you’re an individual who is already prone to anxiety or depression, the toll can be even more significant. “This varies from individual to individual, but people with
depression often have trouble managing negative rumination and negative thoughts,” she says. “By doomscrolling, they are essentially reinforcing a negative and depressive thought process and possibly even intensifying a pre-existing depressed mood.”

As a person continues to excessively absorb negative information, the result can be a genuine impact on their day-to-day lives, says Dr. Gould. “Doomscrolling is likely to produce negative thoughts about one’s life, others around them, and the world. These thoughts can then be paired with potentially unhealthy behaviors such as social withdrawal and withdrawal from physical activity, leading to a more depressed emotional state,” she says. “For example, people may stop engaging in self-care, eating and drinking healthfully, and doing things for others. They may withdraw from talking to friends and engaging in other positive behaviors, because they don’t see the purpose in such a bleak world.”

When you throw the social media component in the mix, the shock value of doomscrolling becomes even more pronounced. “Negative news is highlighted and sensationalized to increase views and reader engagement,” she says. “Online ‘trolls’ and their unfiltered comments and online arguments can make the impact of doomscrolling even more toxic.”

**Getting a handle on doomscrolling and your mental health**

Luckily, you can take some simple steps to keep doomscrolling in check and manage its impact on your health. Here’s what Dr. Gould recommends:

- **Timebox your scrolling.** One of the simplest ways to prevent negative news consumption from getting out of hand is to put limits on it, notes Dr. Gould. If you have trouble doing this on your own, some apps can track your social media use and even put self-imposed limits on them.
Find reliable, positive news sources. Putting a stop to doomscrolling doesn’t mean that you have to be uninformed. Instead, vet a select few reliable, informative news sources to depend on for your daily intake, rather than a social media feed. If the sources mix in some positive news, as well, that’s even better.

Watch out for warning signs. If you find yourself depressed or angry while scrolling through social media, even if you’re viewing happy posts, then you might have a problem that’s worth keeping an eye on. Also, ask for help if you find leads to depressed mood, social withdrawal, and other warning signs.

Take a social media break if needed. Many people take breaks from social media from time to time for this exact reason. “I have many patients who feel a lot better when they take a break from social media,” says Dr. Gould. And if you want to try it again at a later time, you can always come back to it if you feel like you’re ready.

Talk to friends and family. A healthier way to engage in the daily news is to discuss it with trusted friends and family members. This can help you maintain social engagement and discuss your feelings about what’s going on in the world positively and constructively.

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"We've made some progress in the past 30, 40 years, but we still have some of those negative attitudes," says Radu Saveanu, M.D., head of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Miami Health System. "Some still believe that it's a kind of character flaw, that if you're strong enough, you can conquer it." Read more.