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**Is Too Much Social Media Use Bad for Teen Health?**

Spending too much time managing their virtual identities can have a profound, and negative, impact on teens' actual lives.

Feeling the need to have a 24/7 presence online is causing teens to lose sleep and feel anxious or even depressed.

Social media connects people the world over to one another. The problem is that not everyone knows how to disconnect. With constant streams of tweets, status updates and comments to sift through and respond to, social media can create a never-ending and sometimes negative feedback loop.

Teenagers especially can feel a sense of pressure to stay active online. Many experience a need to be responsive on social media 24/7, feeling compelled to answer texts or direct messages almost immediately.

That sense of obligation to be available and the emotional investment involved with maintaining that presence are affecting teens’ mental health, finds a new study to be presented at the British Psychological Society.

[5 Ways Facebook Owns You](http://news.discovery.com/tech/gear-and-gadgets/facebook-owns-you-privacy-130920.htm)

Researchers from the University of Glasgow surveyed 467 teenagers regarding their social media use throughout the day and at night. The scientists also tested for sleep quality and a number of psychological indicators.

The results showed that social media use, particularly at night, along with emotional investment in social networking interactions led to poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety. Teens with lower self-esteem have a higher tendency to be depressed as adults, previous studies have found.

“e have to think about how our kids use social media, in relation to time for switching off,” lead researcher Cleland Woods said in a statement.

Time of day, however, isn’t the only potential factor that could affect teen mental health when it comes to social media use. The amount of time spent on social networking platforms can also have psychological implications, [found a study released in July in the journal Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking](http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/cyber.2015.0055?journalCode=cyber).

Following a survey of 753 middle school and high school students, researchers found that those who spent more than two hours a day on social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter were more likely to report distress, poor mental health and even suicidal thoughts.

[Social Media More Addictive Than Booze and Cigarettes](http://news.discovery.com/tech/social-media-addictive-120204.htm)

Smaller studies have found similar effects in adults as well. [A series of studies commissioned in 2012](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/2012/07/for-some-with-anxiety-technology-can-increase-anxiety/) by the nonprofit Anxiety UK, for example, determined that Facebook can feed anxiety and insecurity. Of those surveyed by the group, half responded that social media had changed their lives, and half of those said it was for the worse, typically as a result of feeling inadequate in comparison to their peers.

Teens likely feel the need to be constantly connected to their social media accounts through their devices and become emotionally invested, because, as several studies have shown, social media can be addictive. In fact, a Norwegian research team in 2012 [published a paper](http://www.amsciepub.com/doi/abs/10.2466/02.09.18.PR0.110.2.501-517) that created a means of measuring social media addiction, called the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale. In developing the scale, the University of Bergen researchers concluded that adolescents, among other groups, are particularly vulnerable to social media addiction.

Other studies into teen social media use bear that out as well. Seventy-one percent of teens have more than one social media account, and 24 percent of teenagers are online “almost constantly,” according to a survey released in April by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. Ninety-two percent are online daily.

[Video: Your Facebook Likes Reveal Everything](http://news.discovery.com/videos/your-facebook-likes-reveal-everything.htm)

Social media, of course, isn’t going anywhere and is a big part of how teenagers communicate. But spending too much time managing their virtual identities can have a profound, and negative, impact on teens’ actual lives.