



SCROLLING THROUGH THE MOODS

Ever noticed your frame of mind turn gloomy while looking at social media? You're not alone

It's evening and before getting ready for bed, you reach for your phone to see if a friend has responded to your message. Before you know it, half an hour has passed, as you've moved on to scrolling through countless photos and numerous posts on social media. But something has made you feel anxious and worried.

You might be sad because you've missed out on an event, worried about the way you look or concerned that people don't like you. It's hard to say exactly what triggered this feeling, but it's there – and it's difficult to shake off.

The Social Dilemma, a documentary-drama on Netflix, explores the downsides of social networking. It illustrates how popular platforms, including Instagram and Facebook, encourage screen addiction by presenting you with an enticing, tailor-made feed that's impossible to ignore – even when posts make you feel sad, stressed or annoyed.

But what keeps us glued to other people's comments? There are the notifications that are difficult to resist – after all, just a quick look is all it takes to check who's posted what, or at least that's what people tell themselves.

According to author and child and adolescent psychologist Claire Halsey, however, there's another reason – curiosity. This is, of course, mostly a beneficial thing. It's human nature to compare and it can lead to new ideas or aspirations, but it can also have downsides.

'Social media can sometimes give the impression that everyone else is more confident, more successful and happier than you are,' she says. 'When you see other people leading their "best lives", it's easy to feel "less than", which can easily affect self-esteem and mood.'

Of course, it's also a great place to discover new topics of interest, form new friendships and share views on a wide

range of issues. So, how can you enjoy the positive side of being online without experiencing the negative?

According to Claire, the first thing to do is be honest with yourself: 'If you notice that you're spending more time looking at your social media feed than you spend with friends in real life, it might be that you need to monitor the number of hours you're spending online, or even take a break.'

There are sensible reasons for keeping an eye on this: 'Feelings of dread, fear, isolation and loss of friends can be triggered by negative social-media posts, trolling and online bullying,' says Claire. 'If these feelings arise, it's important to ask friends, family or a caring professional for help and to be confident in blocking senders of negative or inappropriate messages.'

One way to make it more likely that your feed is encouraging, informative and fills you with positive ideas, is to identify all the sites you currently follow that consistently make you feel good, while unfollowing everything that leaves you down or discouraged.

It can also help to be more aware of your feelings while online. Notice if something you read or see makes your palms sweaty or your heart beat a little faster, and talk it through with a friend or family member. And if you're going through difficult times or you're worried, try to talk to people you trust face to face, rather than relying on social media for advice and feedback.

The most important thing is to make sure that the time you spend online is fun and relaxing. If it doesn't feel that way, try the tips over the page, because there are practical things you can do to transform the experience. Then you can sit back, connect, smile and feel inspired.

