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- MAE WEST

VALUES - BASED QUALITY OF LIFE™ Newsletter

Because Making Smart Choices About Your Money Impacts The Quality of Your Life

Over the years, we have found that there are elements of your life that are more important than money. These elements - Physical Health, Relationship Health, Inner Health and Career Health - cannot be delegated.

We hope that you find these articles to be of value in improving the quality of your life.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Social Media: How Does It Affect our Mental Health and Well-Being?

By Honor Whiteman

In 1971, the first email was delivered. More than 40 years on, social media has taken the world by storm. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are now used by 1 in 4 people worldwide. Such activity may seem harmless, but some researchers suggest social media may affect our mental health and well-being.

In 2012, *Medical News Today* reported on a study suggesting that Facebook use may feed anxiety and increase a person's feeling of inadequacy. A more recent study, led by social psychiatrist Ethan Cross of the University of Michigan, found that using Facebook may even make us miserable. "On the surface, Facebook provides an invaluable resource for fulfilling the basic human need for social connection," says Cross. "But rather than enhance well-being, we found that Facebook use predicts the opposite result - it undermines it." But are such claims exaggerated? Or should we be limiting our use of social media? *Medical News Today* looks at the evidence.

What is social media?

In essence, social media defines an array of Internet sites that enable people from all over the world to interact. This can be through discussion, photos, video and audio. Facebook is the leading social networking site, with more than 1.2 billion global active users every month. The site's popularity is followed closely by MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn and Bebo. On average, Americans spend 7.6 hours using social networking sites, such as Facebook, every month, with the majority of individuals accessing social networking sites through cell phones. The latest statistics show that around 42% of online adults use multiple social networking sites. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of

social media users are under the age of 30, although the number of older users is on the rise. Around 45% of Internet users aged 65 or older now use Facebook, increasing from 35% in 2012.

But what attracts us to social media? In the late 1980s, the first commercial dial-up Internet service provider (ISP) was launched in the US. Internet technology has certainly advanced in the past 25 years, so much so that the words "dial-up" make most people cringe.

Of course, one of the main attractions for connecting to the Internet was, and still is, the ability to better connect with the world around us. For example, the Internet allowed us to send emails as an alternative to the timely process of sending letters through the mail. Social media has built on this premise.

This is Facebook's mission statement: "Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them." This sums up what the majority of social networking sites endeavor to achieve, and there is no doubt that the general public has succumbed to the world of social media, perhaps a little too much.

Social media addiction

Recent statistics show that 63% of American Facebook users log on to the site daily, while 40% of users log on multiple times a day. We all have our own reasons for using social media. Some of us like to browse at other people's status updates and photos, while others use the sites as

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INNER HEALTH

The Only Resolution You Need: Be Nice to Yourself

By Michele Hoos

Recently, I had dinner with a friend and we got to talking about the upcoming year and New Year's resolutions. I told her that every year, I write out a long list of things I'm trying to accomplish for the year.

"So your resolutions are kind of like a to-do list," she observed.

"I guess that's true," I said. "What's your resolution?"

"This is going to sound cheesy, but my resolution is to just be nicer to myself," she said.

"Wow," I realized, "that's a great one."

With my friend's permission, and with an awareness that my previous "to-do list" approach has not worked in any year prior to this one, I have replaced my litany with this far more succinct commitment: I will strive to be nice to myself. And I would recommend this goal to anyone who has already slipped up on a resolution made in this New Year.

After all, how many of us have wasted unnecessary energies on self-criticism when we fail to make it to the gym as often as we'd like, when we sleep late on the weekend, or when we indulge in a few extra calories? We can all work to establish new and healthier habits, but here are some simple ways you can put caring for yourself at the top of your list.

Embrace Self-Compassion

Most of us—especially this time of year—fixate on our flaws. We think about what we have yet to accomplish, what we promised we would finish yet didn't get to, those unmet goals, unread books, and yet-to-be surmounted career goals.

Instead of focusing on what you haven't finished, embrace self-compassion—defined, simply, as your ability to accept your shortcomings with kindness and understanding.

"Having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness," writes Kristen Neff, an expert in the field of self-compassion. "Things will not always go the way you want them to. You will encounter frustrations, losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us."

To find out how self-compassionate you are, test yourself using Neff's self-compassion scale. You can then work to increase your self-compassion using some of the exercises available on her website. [self-compassion.org]

***"There is only one thing
that makes a dream
impossible to achieve:
the fear of failure."***

- Paulo Coelho

Quiet Your Inner Critic

You're most likely very familiar with your inner critic and her tendency to put you down: She's the one who tells you you're not thin enough or smart enough. If you let her, she'll keep you at night up with an endless list of all the things you did wrong that day.

But turns out, quieting your inner critic is good for your mental health. Research shows that self-compassion leads to self-reported feelings of happiness, optimism, and curiosity.

It may not be possible to silence her entirely, but you can start recognizing your inner critic when she acts up. Change the language she uses. Instead of letting her say, "You're lazy," encourage her to speak to

you the way you'd speak to a good friend: "You had a hard day and deserved rest after work! You'll make it to the gym this weekend."

Remind yourself that you are imperfect, and that's perfectly fine.

Be Kind to Others

A recent study at University of California, Berkeley, found that participants who were compassionate towards others were in turn more compassionate toward themselves. It makes sense: Once we're able to accept those around us, it's that much easier to accept ourselves.

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion," says the Dalai Lama. "If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

Research supports the Dalai Lama's sentiment: Kindness towards others leads to enhanced well-being. Want some inspiration? Check out the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation which has a list of kindness ideas to get you started.

Give Yourself Permission

The other day, my friend who planned to make the resolution to be kinder to herself sent me a one-sentence email.

I got her note on an afternoon that I was feeling especially run down and tired, yet trying to push through an imminent cold.

"Were you nice to yourself today?" it read.

I read her note, remembered my resolution, and smiled. Then, I gave myself permission to take a nap.

Give yourself these permissions to be good to yourself in the new year. If you're feeling run down, get more sleep. If you're feeling stressed out, take a break. And if you're feeling bummed out because you haven't met enough of your resolutions or goals, kindly remind yourself: You are enough.

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RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

Goal Setting in Relationships

By Raquel Villarreal

Setting goals with your partner can be a double-edged sword. On one end, when you achieve them you feel joy and exhilaration for having realized a dream or aspiration. On the other hand, when you fail to meet them, you may face disappointment as you are forced to reevaluate your ambitions. When it comes to your relationship, setting achievable goals with a tone of collaboration can help enrich each other's lives and support the bond between you and your partner.

The Anatomy of Relationships

No relationship is the same, and just like people change over time, so does a relationship. According to Donald Peterson, contributing author of "Goal Concepts in Personality and Social Psychology," there are five general stages that can be distinguished in the development of close relationships: acquaintance, buildup, continuation, deterioration and ending. Obviously not all relationships go through all stages, but the changes in goals from one stage to another are critical in determining the course a relationship will follow.

Stephen John Read and Lynn Carol Miller, also contributing authors of "Goal Concepts in Personality and Social Psychology," recount how individuals may base their projections of what a relationship might be like with someone in part on how each other's life goals will mesh with one other. The idea that "opposites attract" has been debunked by research showing how "most married couples tend to be more alike than different in regards to life goals, interests, values and personality dispositions, as well as education, economic status, and other sociological variables." In other words, when evaluating a prospective partner, people look at how they can accomplish goals in common, for example having intellectually stimulating conversations, having children, etc.

Goal-Setting Strategies

Relationship goals can cover the gamut, including areas such as problem solving, emotional support, financial goals, creating a family, etc. One way to set goals in your relationship is by having a weekly meeting with your significant other to go over the upcoming week and set a 'to-do' list of items for each other. Then, review those same items from the past week and move forward anything still needing to be completed. As part of this process, share three positive things big or small that your partner did that you liked in the past week,

"Negativity distracted me from my goals. So I simply don't entertain it. I occasionally laugh at it as well."

- Mama Zara

and one negative thing you would like them to consider working on. In time, you will have created a habit of openly talking about where things are with your relationship, and where you want them to be.

Another way to set goals with your significant other is by applying some of the guidelines set forth in "Goal Setting: How to Create an Action Plan and Achieve Your Goals." Authors Susan B. Wilson and Michael S. Dobson recommend writing them down in specific measurable terms, so that you can visualize and achieve them with realistic deadlines. As part of defining these goals, make sure to keep them manageable and actionable, as well as include a regular review of their progress. Reward desired behavior, reinforce successes however big or small and provide feedback when correction is needed. When correcting, do so in private and be specific, focusing on the error and

not the person to avoid grudges and keep a healthy outlook. Develop objectives for both the short and long term.

From Extrinsic to Intrinsic Motivation

In a study published in the "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology," researchers examined the connection between relationship satisfaction and self-regulation. "Individuals experiencing higher levels of satisfaction in their relationship exhibit higher levels of perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect during goal pursuit." This results in higher rates of daily progress on personal goals. In other words, as your relationship satisfaction increases, so does your motivation to effectively self-regulate your actions and progress toward achieving your goals.

According to Peterson, goals between partners tend to converge to the extent that transformations occur mutually. For example, "a person who initially stopped smoking to please a partner may genuinely come to find smoking abhorrent." Changes in personal dispositions of this kind are independent of the relationship, and when they occur they can reduce the demands for accommodation by shifting the motivation from an extrinsic to an intrinsic place. Keep in mind that any union is limited by the biological needs and personal goals of the individuals in the relationship, so revisiting them on a regular basis can keep interests and values aligned in the long term.

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CAREER HEALTH

My Super Easy Trick to Returning from a Vacation Without Feeling Stressed

By Stacey Gawronski

A few years ago I took a half day on a Friday—a half day!—and while enjoyable, it led to a brutal Monday morning. I knew I had to find a solution—or resign myself to never taking a day off ever. I opted for the solution: Now, the day before I'm due back at the office, I check my email.

I sift through pages of messages, deleting, starring, archiving, reading and then marking unread as necessary. I do this in front of the TV sometimes, with a glass of wine in one hand, the other on my phone. I don't respond to anyone—my out-of-office vacation responder remains on until I'm officially back to work—and I don't ping my manager or forward anything that needs forwarding. Not yet. I simply check out the scene. Doing this in advance of getting back to work reduces my stress and anxiety.

While I understand the desire to be on vacation for as long as humanly possible, by the time I'm off the plane, I've long since said adios to the beach, mountains, or city I've come from. If I stayed true to unplugging while away (which I've gotten really good at!), then it truly doesn't feel as though I'm doing myself any kind of disservice by quietly, subtly, unbeknownst to any of my colleagues, checking in the night before I'm expected to hit the ground running. It takes me all of 15 minutes—and the sheer act of deleting anything that I don't need helps keep me above water the next day when I've got to deal with playing catch-up in addition to the expected workplace demands. The very idea of knowing slightly ahead of time who I need to get back to and in what order puts me at ease.

Yes, it stinks to get away and relish the time off only to return and feel your blissful state immediately melt away by going through your inbox. But because I like to not only enjoy time away from the office, particularly when it's a bonafide vacation, but also maintain that feeling of being recharged and refreshed for at least a few days.

I compromise with myself by doing this. Trust me, it works. The Monday after a trip no longer stresses me out.

And that stress is the reason that so many Americans (55% have unused days according to a study by Project: Time Off) don't use all or any of their vacation days. There's a fear of returning to a mountain of work, a concern that no one else can do your job, that you won't get promoted. Depending on your position, industry, company, and maybe even your boss, taking two weeks off to travel might require you to work overtime in the days and weeks leading up to it. Stressful, indeed!

So even though this little trick won't work for everyone, if like me, you enjoy working hard and taking well-deserved vacations, then you might want to give this simple hack a shot. The first day back after a trip is still probably going to be one of the more demanding days of your work week. Getting back up to speed takes time and can be stressful no matter how well you set yourself up, but trust me when I say that a quick but productive email perusal the day before you're on the clock again can help alleviate at least some of that back-from-vacation anxiety..

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Social Media: Mental Health

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a way to vent their emotions. But according to Dr. Shannon M. Rauch, of Benedictine University at Mesa, AZ, one of the main reasons we use social media is for self-distraction and boredom relief.

"Therefore, social media is delivering a reinforcement every time a person logs on," she says. "For those who post status updates, the reinforcements keep coming in the form of supportive comments and 'likes.' And of course we know that behaviors that are consistently reinforced will be repeated, so it becomes hard for a person who has developed this habit to simply stop." This behavior can lead to Facebook addiction. In fact, such behavior is so common that researchers have created a psychological scale to measure Facebook addiction - the Berge Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS).

The scale, developed by Dr. Cecile Andraessen and colleagues at the University of Bergen in Norway, uses six criteria to measure Facebook addiction. These include statements, such as "you spend a lot of time thinking about Facebook and planning how to use it" and "you use Facebook to forget about personal problems." The researchers say that scoring "often" or "very often" on four of the six criteria indicates Facebook addiction.

What is interesting is that the researchers found that people who are more anxious and socially insecure are more likely to use the social networking site. Last year, *Medical News Today* reported on a study that provided a potential explanation for addiction to Facebook "fame."

The research team, led by Dar Meshi of the Freie Universität in Germany, found that individuals who gained positive feedback about themselves on Facebook showed stronger activity in the nucleus accumbens of the brain - a region associated with "reward" processing. This stronger activity correlated with greater Facebook use.

From these studies, it appears that many users who are addicted to Facebook use the site as a way of gaining attention and boosting their self-esteem. But can this behavior have negative effects on mental health and well-being?

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