



How to deal with doomscrolling

Long gone are the days of relying on morning papers, midday radio updates and the evening news for information. With smartphones and social media, events around the world can be shared instantly – and even streamed live.

But when we surround ourselves with information during hard times, we can find ourselves buried in negative news – and end up doomscrolling.

What is doomscrolling?

“Doomscrolling is the use of scroll-able social media apps for the overconsumption of negative news,” says Jodie Voth, manager of Employee Assistance Services at Manitoba Blue Cross. “Doomscrollers tend to show reluctance to stop consuming negative news, even when it saddens, disgusts, causes anxious feelings or otherwise upsets them.”

“Doomscrolling” is a relatively new term – it’s thought to have originated on Twitter in 2018 – but after going viral in 2020, it has since been added to major dictionaries.

The psychology behind doomscrolling

Why do we doomscroll in the first place?

“The human brain is hardwired to seek out negative things; it’s a survival mechanism,” Voth says. “In our caveman days, those who could identify and remember things that were associated with danger were more likely to survive by avoiding or protecting themselves from those things. Our brains still watch for and latch onto perceived threats to our safety – like dark news – more than positive stuff.”

With ongoing conflict throughout the world, negative news is nearly impossible to avoid.

“It’s normal and healthy (to some degree!) to be aware of world events and to worry about the impact they can have on us,” Voth says. “The other end of that spectrum is the head-in-the-sand approach, which isn’t ideal either.”

But while keeping current with the news can be important, doomscrolling causes us to be exposed to a disproportionate amount of negativity. Our brains are still driven to gather this information in an effort to protect ourselves – but not all of this information is related to an actual risk facing us.

The accumulation of all that negative information and a disproportionately low amount of positive information can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, hopelessness and isolation, Voth says.



"Doomscrolling also impacts people's worldview, which is particularly dangerous because our worldview is the lens through which we see everything, from political issues to family relationships to our quality of life," she says.

This negative state of mind can also further impact social media use, even when not doomscrolling.

"I've heard it said that comparison is the root of unhappiness," says Matthew Nordick, an intake worker with Manitoba Blue Cross's Employee Assistance Program. "If people are in a depressive mindset, or state of anxiousness, the apps on our phones that are so addictive also become tools for comparison. You may be happy, but this person is even happier. What's wrong with you? Why aren't you as happy as they are? Or, I am struggling, but this person is struggling more. Am I not as strong as they are? These comparisons may increase feelings of guilt or shame, possibly resulting in people becoming hypercritical of themselves."

How do we stop doomscrolling?

With social media addiction becoming a hotter topic, tech companies have started to implement initiatives to help users stay mindful of the time they spend on their phones.

For instance, you can set time limits on apps, with a "time out" message displaying when you've hit your pre-selected limit.

But some people may find these limits easy to ignore, as you can typically just close the notice that appears and continue to scroll.

In that case, Nordick recommends taking more decisive action.

"I take social media tolerance breaks," he says. "I delete the apps off my smart phone. I will check in every couple

of days on my desktop computer. I find that if I have the apps on my phone, I will use them."

There are also mindfulness apps that feature grounding meditations and cognitive behavioural therapy strategies to help make time on your phone more beneficial to your mental health.

Another way to help make your time on social media more positive is by adjusting the content you see. Research has shown that humans do best when they have a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative feedback – the same approach is a good goal for general input into our brain.

"It's worth reviewing the accounts you follow on social media and considering whether you typically see positive content or negative content from them, then purging or adding to get closer to a 5:1 ratio," Voth says.

This article was last updated in December 2025 for freshness and accuracy. The information provided by quoted experts reflects their roles when they were originally interviewed.

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