

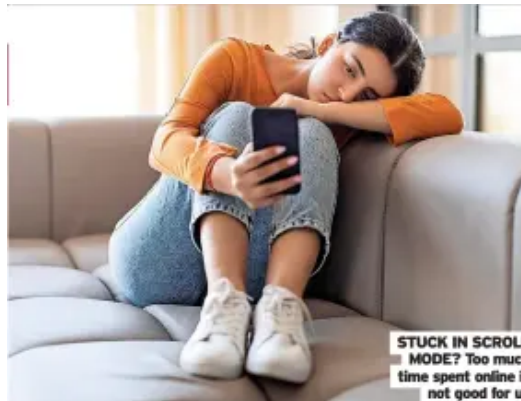
- Social networking

Stop the brain rot

Be mindful about the content you are consuming and how long you spend looking at it. By

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IF you feel lethargic after mindlessly scrolling through TikTok in bed, you have probably experienced brain rot – which has been named the Oxford Word of the Year 2024.



The phrase came out on top after a public vote of more than 37,000 people worldwide. But what is it? And is there anything we can do to prevent negative side effects?

WHAT IS BRAIN ROT?

“Brain rot is a term people use to describe that foggy, numbed-out feeling you get when you’ve consumed too much low-quality, repetitive content,” explains Dr Elena Touroni, a consultant psychologist at The Chelsea Psychology Clinic.

“It’s that sense of being mentally drained or dulled after hours of scrolling social media, bingewatching shows, or engaging with material that doesn’t challenge or stimulate your mind.”

But brain rot is nothing new. “It was American writer [Henry David] Thoreau who used the term in 1854 in his book *Walden*, which argued for a simple life, being closer to nature, and getting away from the constant chatter of news and trivial matters that was running rife in England at the time,” says Craig Jackson, professor of occupational health psychology at Birmingham City University.

“Also, Alvin Toffler wrote in the 1970s that the consumption of too much media was causing future shock in people – a form of mental and cognitive inertia.”

WHY IS IT ON THE RISE?

“Brain rot captures a shared experience in today’s hyper-digital world, where many of us feel glued to our screens,” notes Dr Touroni. “With the rise of short-form content, like TikTok and Instagram Reels, and the increasing time spent online, the term has struck a chord.”

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

“There is no known physical change to the brain or nervous system in those over-exposed to ‘brain rot’ media, but it is both a cognitive and behavioural change,” clarifies Craig.

“The effects can range from difficulty concentrating and reduced productivity to a sense of dissatisfaction or even guilt about wasted time,” says Dr Touroni. “It can also impact mental health, contributing to feelings of stress, anxiety, or a lack of purpose.

“Over time, it can make it harder to focus on meaningful activities or connect with deeper thoughts.”

HOW TO COMBAT IT

1. Set limits

“Limit access to social media,” advises Craig. “Restrict use to a few set times a day and for set periods.”

2. Find alternatives

“Swap passive scrolling for more enriching activities, like reading a book, journaling, or exploring a creative hobby,” suggests Dr Touroni.

3. Get moving

“Regular exercise is a powerful antidote to mental fog,” highlights Dr Touroni. “Even a short walk outdoors can help clear your mind.”

Take a digital detox “Although a cliché, a digital detox and going cold turkey from social media can change how users view their relationships with social media,” says Craig. “A week free

4. from Twitter use will change how it is viewed going forward.”

5. Stimulate your brain in positive ways

“Engage with material that challenges you, like learning a new skill, solving puzzles, or having meaningful conversations,” advises Dr Touroni.

6. Be intentional about media choices

“Choose content that aligns with your interests and values, such as documentaries, thoughtful podcasts or books that inspire you,” Dr Touroni suggests