

- Sleep / Screen time

# IT'S NOT ALL *doom and gloom*

When the news agenda moves fast it can feel like we need to keep in touch 24/7, but no one benefits from doom scrolling, says Camilla Foster



**G**etting a nice early night is one thing, but how often have you gone to bed at 9pm, feeling all virtuous, just to spend the next three hours on your phone? Whether it's plodding through your socials and making yourself feel inadequate, or scrolling endlessly through depressing news feeds, either way you can end up in a much worse state than if you'd just rolled into bed at 11pm and fallen asleep then.

The reality is, when there's so much news around us all day long, it's increasingly easy to get sucked into a rabbit hole of articles, memes and Tweets (or should that be Xs?). But what is this doing to our mental health? Should we consider setting limits on how much content we are consuming, for our own good? Here, Dr Sheethal Rajashanker, a consultant psychiatrist at Priory Hospital Cheadle Royal and Priory Wellbeing Centre Manchester, explains the consequences of 'doom scrolling', and shares some ideas on how to stop it affecting your wellbeing.

### Why do we doom scroll?

Mindlessly scrolling through our phones is very addictive and is usually provoked by a mix of psychological and social factors. 'This might start off with a desire for information, as people often feel the need to stay informed of current events,' explains Dr Rajashanker. 'For some people, doom scrolling provides a false sense of control over uncertain situations.'

### Algorithms spark binges

'Social media algorithms are designed to maximise engagement and this can create a feedback loop where users are continuously exposed to alarming news,' says Dr Rajashanker. 'And for those who are already experiencing anxiety and stress, doom scrolling can serve as a coping mechanism.'

### Does it impact your health?

'Doom scrolling can be detrimental to your wellbeing for several reasons,' says Dr Rajashanker. 'For example, constant exposure to negative news can heighten feelings of anxiety and stress and can create a sense of impending doom and helplessness about current events.'

'Regularly engaging in doom scrolling can also lead to mood swings, irritability, and feelings of sadness or despair, impacting overall emotional health.'

### It can be detrimental to your sleeping pattern

'Consuming distressing content, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to difficulties in falling asleep or experiencing restful sleep,' explains Dr Rajashanker.

Mindless scrolling during a period of heightened political tension could also impact your relationships. 'If doom scrolling leads to avoidance of social interactions or discussions, it can result in feelings of loneliness and isolation,' highlights Dr Rajashanker.

'On the other hand, engaging in heated discussions or arguments about political or social issues can strain relationships with friends and family.'

In addition, doom scrolling often develops into an unhealthy mechanism. 'For some, doom scrolling becomes a way to cope with anxiety or uncertainty, but it often exacerbates rather than alleviates these feelings,' she adds.

### Is there any content we should particularly avoid?

'People should try and avoid and be aware of sensationalised news, polarising political content and unverified information,' warns Dr Rajashanker. 'People should also be mindful of the impact of frequent notifications about breaking news as these can create a sense of urgency leading to anxiety.'

'Negative social media feeds and graphics or distressing imagery can be particularly triggering and harmful to mental health.'

### How do you keep track of news without it taking over your life?

'To promote better mental health, it can be helpful to establish boundaries around consumption, engage in self care activities and seek out positive or constructive content,' advises Dr Rajashanker. 'Mindfulness practices, such as meditation or limiting screen time, can also be effective strategies to mitigate the negative effects of doom scrolling.'