

The Risks of Using Social Media for Health Information

Social media can be a way to connect with others. Some people also use social media as a source of news and information. Social media is not a reliable place to get advice about your physical or mental health. Here are some important things to keep in mind:

1. Information Can Be Misleading

Anyone can post advice online – even if they have no qualifications. Most content creators do not have qualifications to provide advice about your physical or mental health. Posts often share personal opinions, not evidence-based strategies. What works for one person may not work for you.



Content creators rely on their posts generating interest and engagement. Well known, sensible health advice is often not attention grabbing enough for this. This means content creators can be motivated to post about things that are more unique or controversial, increasing your risk of being exposed to health information that is not evidence-based.

2. It's Unregulated

There is minimal regulation of online content and social media content isn't checked for accuracy. There are no guarantees that the advice is safe or effective. There are often no consequences for people who post misleading information. Some posts may promote harmful or unproven treatments.

3. Creators May Be Incentivized

Many influencers earn money through sponsorships and product sales. This means advice may be driven by profit, not your health. Products promoted online may not be backed by research or approved by health authorities.



4. Algorithms May Be Damaging

Social media platforms use algorithms to show you more of what you engage with. This can create an echo chamber, where you only see similar content. Over time, this can reinforce negative thinking or unhealthy behaviors.

Algorithms often prioritize attention-grabbing content, not accuracy. This can lead to exposure to increasingly extreme content.

Social media algorithms also use your personal information, such as your location, search history and how you use apps on your phone to target content towards you. This can increase your vulnerability to be exposed to unhelpful information.

Finding Reliable Health Information

It is understandable to want to use the internet to answer your health questions. It is free and convenient, whereas appointments with a health professional often cost money and can be hard to schedule. It can also help you feel less alone when you read or hear about other people with similar concerns.

It is important that before making any health decisions you seek information from a reliable, qualified source. Some helpful places to look for health information online include:

Mental Health Websites:

- cci.health.wa.gov.au
- blackdoginstitute.org.au
- beyondblue.org.au
- butterfly.org.au



Health Websites:

- healthdirect.gov.au
- betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- who.int

It is important to know that online information is not a substitute for professional care, and if you are dealing with a health concern it is always recommended to see a qualified health professional that can tailor their advice to your personal situation.

Tips for Staying Safe

- Check the source: Is the person qualified? Are they citing evidence?
- Be cautious of quick fixes, advice that conflicts with what a professional has told you, unusual advice, or “one-size-fits-all” advice.
- Use trusted websites Please see the ‘[Dealing with Health Information](#)’ and the ‘[AI and your Mental Health](#)’ handouts for more advice about finding health information online.
- If you're struggling, seek help from a registered health professional.