

# A Little Less Social Media Use, A Little More Physical Activity Can Effectively Protect Mental Health, Researchers Say

*Recent study adds to research showing that less screen time and more exercise and in-person social interaction are valid non-drug approaches to mental health.*

WASHINGTON, DC, US, December 1, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The use of social media increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternate means of social interaction when social distancing was advised and in-person contact was minimized. But over time, the use of social media can become excessive. Previous research has found that prolonged time spent on social media can eventually have a negative impact on mental health – a factor that could have contributed to the increase in depression and anxiety reported during the pandemic, while decreasing social media use has been found to improve mental health.



The combination of cutting time on social media and increasing physical activity has the greatest benefit for mental well-being, according to researchers.

A team of German researchers explored how to prevent the harm to mental health from excessive social media use during the pandemic or other times of social distancing, looking for strategies that could be implemented without added time or expense. Because physical activity has also been found to be an important protective factor for mental health, the researchers devised a study, conducted from June 2020 to December 2021, that combined a reduction in the use of social media with an increase in physical activity in a study to investigate the impact on mental wellbeing of these two lifestyle changes. [1]

The study participants, adults aged 18 or older, were divided into three experimental groups and one control group. For two weeks, one group decreased social media use by 30 minutes a day, one group increased physical activity by 30 minutes a day, one group combined both by replacing 30 minutes of social media use with 30 minutes of physical activity, and the control group made no change. The participants completed online surveys concerning their physical

and mental wellbeing at six times over the following six months.

Six months after the experimental period, all three experimental groups were experiencing an increased satisfaction with life and decreased depression symptoms. All three experimental groups were spending less time on social media and more time engaging in physical activity. The combination of cutting time on social media and increasing physical activity had the greatest impact on mental wellbeing.

“Our causal findings indicate that [the use of social media’s] moderate reduction in combination with a moderate increase of physical activity could be an effective and cost-efficient strategy to protect mental health,” lead author Julia Brailovskaia, PhD, of Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany, wrote in the *Journal of Public Health*.



Just two and a half hours per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, can lower the risk of depression by 25%.

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Moderate reduction [in social media use] in combination with a moderate increase of physical activity could be an effective and cost-efficient strategy to protect mental health.”

*Julia Brailovskaia, PhD, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany*

The researchers further advised that mental health-related “prevention programs could improve their effectiveness by integrating [these] time- and cost-efficient interventions – separately or in combination” and that the strategies could also be used as treatment for depression.

Another 2022 study found that even relatively small amounts of physical activity were associated with a substantially lower risk of becoming depressed. Just two and a half hours per week of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, was associated with a 25% lower risk of depression compared with no activity. [2]

Other recent research has found that individuals with more supportive or more frequent social contact had fewer symptoms of depression during the COVID-19 pandemic, with face-to-face interaction more beneficial than by phone or video. [3] Confiding in others was found to be the factor most associated with a reduced risk of depression in another recent study, even for individuals deemed at-risk for depression due to earlier trauma they experienced. Visiting family and friends was also found to be protective of mental health. [4]

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) supports safe and effective non-drug approaches to mental health. CCHR also advocates for the full disclosure of the risks of serious side effects and withdrawal symptoms from antidepressants and other psychiatric drugs, so that patients and their doctors can make fully informed decisions about starting or stopping the drugs. [5]

CCHR recommends a complete physical examination with lab tests, nutritional and allergy screenings, and a review of all current medications to identify any physical causes of depression or other unwanted mental or emotional symptoms, which might otherwise be misdiagnosed and incorrectly treated as a psychiatric disorder.



**WARNING:** Anyone wishing to discontinue or change the dose of a psychiatric drug is cautioned to do so only under the supervision of a physician because of potentially dangerous withdrawal symptoms.

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights was co-founded in 1969 by members of the Church of Scientology and the late psychiatrist and humanitarian Thomas Szasz, M.D., recognized by many academics as modern psychiatry's most authoritative critic, to eradicate abuses and restore human rights and dignity to the field of mental health. CCHR has been instrumental in obtaining 228 laws against psychiatric abuses and violations of human rights worldwide.

The CCHR National Affairs Office in Washington, DC, has advocated for mental health rights and protections at the state and federal level. The CCHR traveling exhibit, which has toured 441 major cities worldwide and educated over 800,000 people on the history to the present day of abusive and racist psychiatric practices, has been displayed at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, and at other locations.

[1] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9437404/>

[2] <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2790780>

[3] <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/psychological-medicine/article/social-relationships-and-depression-during-the-covid19-lockdown-longitudinal-analysis-of-the-covid19-social-study/C4EC01109B848D2306416BFDC33787C5>

[4] <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/epdf/10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.19111158>

[5] [www.cchrint.org/psychdrugdangers](http://www.cchrint.org/psychdrugdangers)

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