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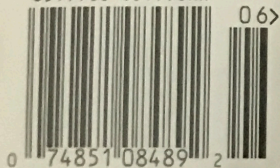
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# Power down

Get your online interactions under control before social media affects your mama mojo. **BY CHRISTA MELNYK HINES**

**Y**ou know you're supposed to sleep when the baby sleeps, but if you're spending what little free time you have connecting with friends on social media, you may not be caring for yourself—or your little one—the way you should.

“Checking into social media frequently is easy to get sucked into as a new mom. It's the most convenient thing to do when you're sleep-deprived, recovering from birth and perhaps unable to do anything active,” shares Alaina Brubaker, LMFT, who counsels women on pregnancy and postpartum issues in Rochester, New York.

Experts agree that social media can be a fun escape. But constantly buzzing in for a quick hit can take you down a virtual vortex of rabbit holes where you lose time and experience downward mood shifts. If it gets too out of control, the diversion can even hamper precious one-on-one time with your newbie.

“It's a delicate balance,” says Shari-ann James, a psychologist at Perinatal Wellness & Psychological Services in Orlando. “It's good for moms to use social media as an outlet, but then also to be mindful that the information out there on social media can really impact one's emotional and psychological well-being.”

You don't have to unplug altogether to save your sanity. Here's how to stay connected (and share plenty of snapshots of your mini muse with friends and family) without going overboard ...

## Take a mindful approach

Funny memes, silly cat videos, interesting articles and cute kid pics make social media entertaining. But stumbling across online rants, mean-spirited comments or posts that leave you teary-eyed can fuel anxiety, depression and even fear—and those feelings can linger and distract you long after you turn your attention back to baby.

With fluctuating hormones following birth, new moms are in a delicate state and can be especially vulnerable to emotionally charged issues. Protect your emotional

**88%**  
OF MOMS USE  
SOCIAL MEDIA,  
AND MORE THAN  
HALF CHECK IN  
SEVERAL TIMES  
EACH DAY.

(Source: Edison  
Research)

health by following inspiring, uplifting individuals. And join groups that are welcoming, supportive and committed to respectful dialogue.

“Social media can definitely provide a healthy support system for women when used in the right ways,” Brubaker explains. “Look for groups that accept all different ways of being a mom.”

In many online forums, you'll get more than your fair share of opinionated child-rearing advice. To avoid becoming overwhelmed, be selective about whose advice you choose to consume and follow. Seek the wisdom of your health care providers, moms you respect and experts whose philosophies resonate with you. Above all, trust that, more than anyone, you know your baby best.

“Paying attention to your baby, listening to her feedback and learning how to make sense of her moods and needs will be infinitely more rewarding than following SuperiorMama177,” assures Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, author of *The Distraction Addiction* and *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*.

**tip**

If you feel that social media is eating at your mental well-being and affecting your bond with your baby and your loved ones, seek the advice of a trained therapist.



## Tend and befriend

According to the American Psychological Association, new mothers can be more susceptible to postpartum depression if they lack social support. In addition to feelings of anxiety and exhaustion, postpartum depression can interfere with the bond a new mother has with her child.

While social media can help ease a sense of isolation when you're cooped up at home with a newborn, it can't completely fulfill our social needs. Superficial connections that survive on likes and brief comments alone eventually experience growth stunts or sputter out.

“It's important to have strong interpersonal connections with others. When we have opportunities to really connect with someone, especially over the phone or in person, then that part of ourselves is being really fulfilled and really nourished,” James notes. “If you're having that urge to connect, this may be a good opportunity to pick up the phone, talk to someone you haven't in a while and maybe rekindle a friendship.”

Multiple studies show that time spent with friends boosts a woman's level of oxytocin, also known as the “love hormone.” This powerful, feel-good hormone not only encourages us to care for our offspring, it also calms stress, boosts the immune system and is good for overall health. >>





Online social networks can pave the way for friendships to blossom, but seek opportunities to connect in person, too. "While it's wonderful to reach out to someone online in the middle of the night when you have a screaming baby, you also want to connect with people who you can get together with during the day," Brubaker encourages. "Having just the online support can keep women isolated and prevent them from going outside the home. That isolation can lead to feeling depressed."

Local mothers groups can be a good starting point. Look for one that has both an online and an offline component. Through activities like regular meetings, moms night out, walks or playdates with your tots, you'll have more opportunities to strengthen fledgling friendships.

## Avoid comparison

Your baby is nestled in your arms lightly snoozing, so you decide to hop on Facebook. With an envious sigh, you read that your friend's infant is already sleeping through the night. You wonder, *What's her secret?* Another mom waxes poetic on the beauty of motherhood. You worry, *Why don't I feel that way right now?* You keep scrolling and stop to study a photo of a group of laughing friends toasting margaritas at a sun-soaked resort. Ah, if only ...

"It's like everyone else is living their life, and you're stuck," Brubaker explains. "I find that social media opens the door for a lot of comparison to other new moms and to friends without children. You can become wistful for what life was like and

jealous of other mothers who seem to be having an easy time."

Reading these kinds of posts might also leave you feeling inadequate, frustrated and irritated. "Sometimes when women go on to social media, they see what they feel is portrayed as an expectation of how they should be feeling as a new mother or how to mother," James explains. "Those comments and images can cause a woman to feel bad about herself because she feels as though she's not living up to those expectations."

As the adage goes, comparison is the thief of joy. Try to put those carefully curated squares into perspective. The glowing parental updates, tidy homes and shining faces smiling back at you are simply single snapshots of another person's life—certainly not the whole messy package.

## Strive for balance

Seek a happy medium between checking in and checking out to best manage your time and emotions and to be present with your rapidly growing baby.

"Moms definitely need these outlets, but you also don't want to miss out on those precious moments that you have to bond with your baby," James points out. "It's not always going to be responding to a cry. It's just being close—hugging your baby, smiling at your baby and looking in your baby's eyes."

Set a timer to help manage the time you spend online. Better yet: "Delete apps from your phone to avoid unconsciously going on social media," advises Brubaker.

Pang recommends periodically taking a digital hiatus where you unplug from your devices or specific apps for 24 hours. "The purpose of a 'digital sabbath' is to give

## Signs of social media addiction

- Compulsively checking your phone.
- Clicking on social media without planning on it.
- Losing vast amounts of time to social media.
- Feeling anxious or a fear of missing out.
- Forgetting to eat, drink or engage in self-care.
- Noticing a change in mood (sad, depressed, overwhelmed).
- Feeling withdrawn from baby, partner, friends and family.



### TAKE BACK CONTROL IN THREE EASY STEPS

- ① Delete apps from your phone to avoid reflexively checking social media feeds.
- ② Temper temptation by turning off social media updates and emails.
- ③ Decide to check social media at set times of the day, and set a timer for how long you'd like to spend online.

## tip

Switch all apps to receive data through Wi-Fi only, then turn off the Wi-Fi on your phone, suggests Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, author of *The Distraction Addiction and Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*. Presto! You're ready to party like it's 1999.

yourself a break from the constant stream of interaction with the digital world, to create a space in which you can appreciate your surroundings and to practice taking control over your digital life," he says.

As you grow more conscious of how much time you spend on social media and how it makes you feel, you'll be better able to recognize when you need to take a break.

Pang notes that those who regularly take time to disconnect from their devices generally find it easier to resist the urgency that surrounds online interactions. "They get a better perspective on the value of spending time online or offline. They use it as a chance to practice being more mindful and in the moment. And they use the time a sabbath creates for other activities." P&N