



## Protecting Our Mental Health from Negative News Coverage

In today's fast-paced media climate, the 24-hour news cycle can seem impossible to avoid. We are bombarded with dramatic news coverage and endless clickbait, which has more of an impact on mental health than we may realize.

### HOW DOES NEGATIVE NEWS COVERAGE IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH?

- **Watching upsetting news footage starts the body's "fight or flight" response.** Adrenaline is then released, and so is the stress hormone, cortisol. When our bodies are in this state, we experience the same symptoms we might experience if we were under threat. These symptoms include rapid heart rate, shallow breathing, upset stomach, etc.
- **The news increases depression and anxiety symptoms.** One study found that people showed an increase in symptoms after only 14 minutes of news consumption. These symptoms are made worse when people feel they have no ability to improve the situations they are learning about on the news.
- **Relying on social media for your news can drive addictive behavior.** This is important to note since more than 50% of Americans receive their news via social media. Clickbait headlines and social media algorithms are designed to keep you coming back for more, making it difficult to stop returning to apps for your news.

### HOW CAN WE PROTECT OUR MENTAL HEALTH?

- **Identify your triggers.** Take some time to think about what subjects stir symptoms of anxiety and depression. Some people may be more reactive to global conflict while others may feel more affected by racial injustice. Once you've figured out what has the strongest impact on you, you can limit your consumption of media with triggering content.
- **Try reading the news instead of watching it,** as studies show this can be less triggering, in

part due to less disturbing imagery with written articles.

- **Limit your time with the news.** Doom scrolling might help you feel more informed about how to protect yourself from the troubles of the world, but it ultimately does more harm than good. Aim for no more than 30 minutes per day if possible.
- **Take action** by getting involved with a group that is working on the issues that you are most passionate about. This can help you feel empowered to make change instead of feeling helpless about the world around you.
- **Join an affinity group.** Affinity groups are supportive communities of people who share a common identity, often including their allies. These groups can help foster resilience and create solidarity during times of prejudice or injustice, especially for people from BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or other minoritized groups.
- **Be mindful of your sources.** Sometimes what feels like news can be more based on opinion than facts, so where you get your news can make a big difference. Make sure the information you're getting is accurate and provides a variety of perspectives.
- **Enhance optimism in your life** by doing more of what brings you joy and satisfaction. Some examples include: social activities, spiritual practices, physical movement, mindfulness, creative hobbies, journaling, gratitude practices, or spending time with a pet.

It can feel hard to escape from the chaos of constant news coverage. While some groups are impacted more significantly, the long-term effects on all of us can include desensitization, as well as a reduced ability to cope with the stressors of everyday life.

**Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance Program (JHEAP)** can help you and those you care about connect to professional counseling for any issue that's on your mind. Access is free, confidential, and 24/7.

