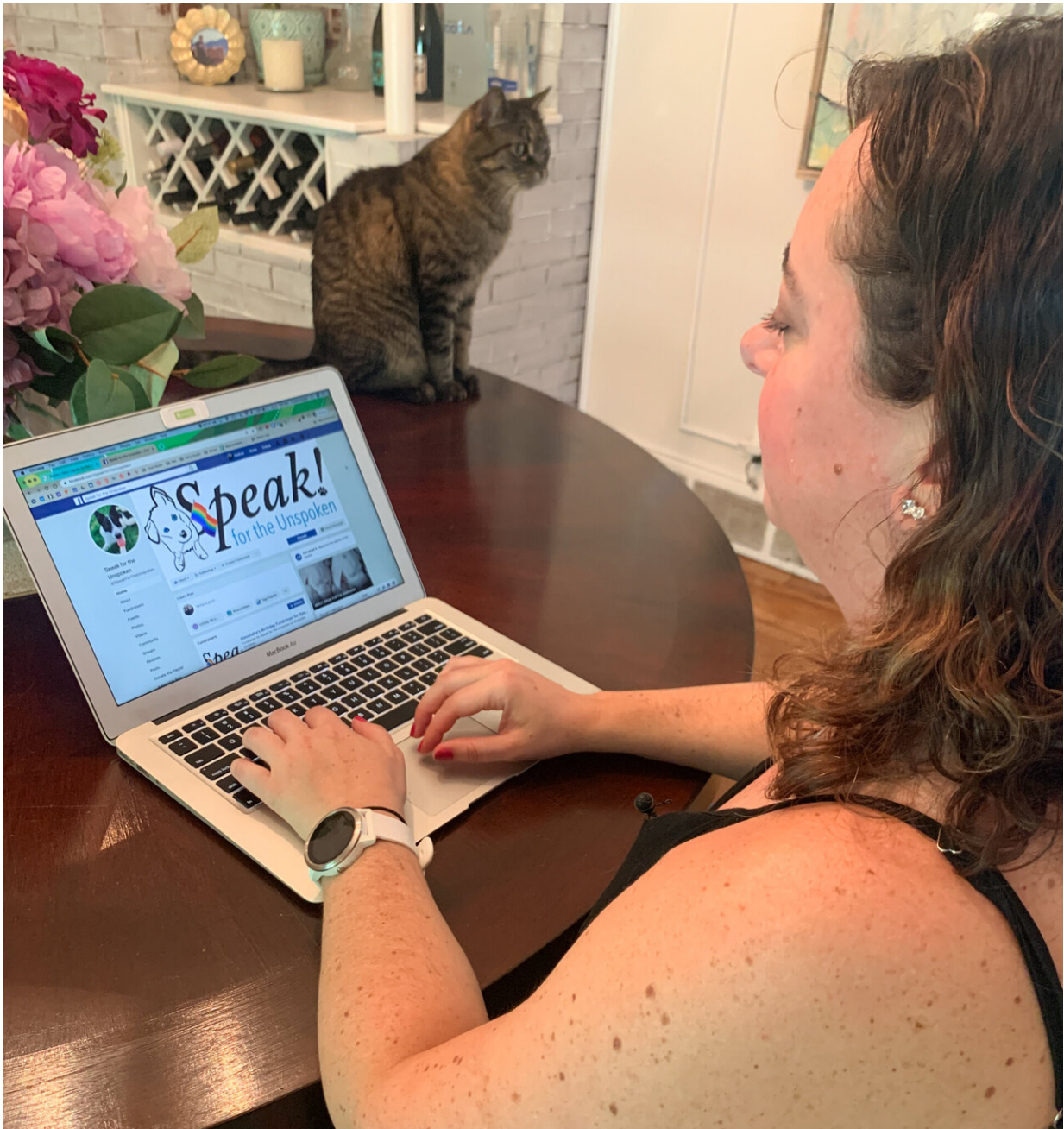


Survey finds Americans social media habits changing as national tensions rise

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When the negativity of social media posts and comment sections becomes overwhelming, Andrea Koder feels empowered by volunteering for causes she cares about, like fostering shelter animals. Credit: The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

As national tensions rise, a new national survey of 2,000 people commissioned by The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center finds more Americans are adjusting how they use social media platforms.

Many participants cited stress from the global COVID-19 pandemic, along with the movement to end racial inequality and other divisive political issues in our country as reasons for taking a [social media](#) break.

While it may seem impossible to disconnect and step away from social media, some survey participants reported changing their social media habits this year. The survey found:

- More than half of Americans (56%) say their social media habits have changed because of tensions surrounding current events this year.
- Almost 3 in 10 Americans (29%) say their [social media use](#) has increased because of tensions surrounding current events this year.
- And 1 in 5 Americans (20%) say they've taken breaks from social media because of tensions surrounding [current events](#) this year.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by information, opinions and arguments

while scrolling through social media channels, said Ken Yeager, Ph.D., director of the Stress, Trauma and Resilience (STAR) Program at Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.

"Stepping away and reconnecting with reality offline is an important step to take for your mental health," Yeager said. "Being constantly immersed in this stressful environment and being overexposed to contentious or traumatic events can make you feel like the world is a less safe place to be. And because these stressors have persisted over a long period of time, it's wearing on people's ability to cope with that stress."

Across the United States, there's been an increase in cases of depression, anxiety, suicidality and substance abuse over the past several months, said Yeager, who is a clinical professor in The Ohio State University College of Medicine.

"Even though you can't control what happens on social media, it's important to recognize how it may affect you and take steps to limit your exposure," Yeager said.

He offers these tips to go on a social media diet:

- Reconnect with family and friends—Disconnect from your devices and stop scrolling on social media for a night. Instead, make plans with the people you care about, even if that's a group Zoom call. An evening of friendly conversation can be a welcome break from social media.
- Create positive change in your community—Volunteer at a food bank, clean up a park or do anything that makes your neighborhood a better place. Seeing the good that you and others in your community are doing can help you realize what's truly important.
- Use your power—Not only do you have the power of your vote,

but you also have the power to voice your concerns and enact local change. Get involved in the issues that are important to you. Feeling like you're part of the process can be empowering and calming.

- Talk about it—There can be a lot of misunderstandings in conversations about the biggest issues we are facing now, especially when they take place in social [media](#) comment sections. Talking to family and friends one-on-one about what is important to them and how they believe these issues affect them can help you understand where they're coming from.

Anyone who is regularly feeling panicked or having trouble controlling their mood or connecting with others should seek help from a [mental health](#) professional to learn ways to cope, Yeager said.

Provided by The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

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