

# Focus on sleep quality over social media quantity to improve young people's well-being

January 18 2021, by Damian Scarf

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Worried about how social media use is affecting your teenager's well-being? University of Otago research has revealed you may be focusing

on the wrong issue.

In a study published in international journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* the researchers found we should be more worried about sleep.

Co-author Dr. Damian Scarf, of the Department of Psychology, says sleep is critically important for the [mental health](#) and well-being of adolescents and [young adults](#).

"Sleep quality is predictive of depression and may be a unique risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

"Parents and [young people](#) should ensure they have good sleep hygiene, like stopping [social media use](#) at a specific time each day and not accessing [social media](#) when in bed," he says.

The researchers recruited 132 tertiary students for the study; half of them limited their use of Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat to 10 minutes per app, per day, for one week.

They found this break only had a small impact on well-being.

"More importantly, the small benefit of lowering social [media](#) use appeared to be due to an increase in sleep quality."

Social media platforms are extremely popular, particularly for young people. Due to its popularity, social media has drawn the attention of both parents and researchers, raising questions about the negative effects of social media on mental health and well-being.

"However, rather than becoming pre-occupied with their social media use and trying to keep up with the emergence of new platforms, such as

TikTok, parents should focus on sleep," Dr. Scarf says.

Lead author Sarah Graham, Ph.D. candidate, says this does not take away the importance of being mindful of the impact social media can have on some users.

"Although we did not see large impacts of social media overall, it is important to keep in mind that some young people may be more impacted by social media than others.

"An image-based platform like Instagram may become problematic for young females that have poor body image. So, parents should be wary of factors that may make their teenager more sensitive to social media content," she says.

**More information:** Sarah Graham et al. Taking a Break from Social Media Improves Wellbeing Through Sleep Quality, *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* (2021). [DOI: 10.1089/cyber.2020.0217](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0217)

Provided by University of Otago

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