

Cutting down on social media to improve teens and young adults' body image

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Teens in North America are spending several hours per day on screens, and there's growing concern over how social media may affect their mental health. A new study, published in *Psychology of Popular Media*,

found that limiting screen time to about one hour per day helped anxious teens and young adults feel better about their body image and their appearance.

Study lead author Helen Thai, a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology, in collaboration with researchers from Carleton University, recruited a few hundred volunteers between the ages of 17 and 25, all of whom had experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Half of the participants were asked to reduce their social media to 60 minutes a day for three weeks, Thai says. The other half continued to use social media with no restrictions, which averaged about three hours per day. The researchers gave the participants surveys at the beginning and end of the study that included statements such as "I'm pretty happy about the way I look," and "I am satisfied with my weight."

Among the group that cut [social media](#) use, the overall score on body image improved. "The [digital world](#) is here to stay," said Thai. So, she says, the question becomes, "how do we adapt to this new world in a way that wouldn't negatively impact or control us?"

More information: Helen Thai et al, Reducing social media use improves appearance and weight esteem in youth with emotional distress., *Psychology of Popular Media* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/ppm0000460](#). www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel...s/ppm-ppm0000460.pdf

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