

Social media health check

Use these questions to help parents become more digitally aware of the impact that social media use has on their wellbeing

- *What social media sites do you regularly access?*
- *How often do you access them?*
- *Do you feel the need or desire to post regularly about your life?*
- *Do you always have a device with you or nearby?*
- *Have you thought about consent and the privacy of your baby as an individual, and what it means to have a digital footprint even prior to birth?*
- *What will your child's digital footprint say about him when he's an adult?*
- *Have you given consent to use the data that is collected around your pregnancy and parenting decision that certain websites and apps collect?*

10 ways to have a healthy relationship with your social media

1. **Turn off** your notifications.
2. **Delete** apps off your phone and only access them on your computer at home.
3. **Limit** the amount you post, including photos and videos.
4. **Limit** who you connect with on social media, and make sure those connections are positive ones.
5. **Schedule** time to engage with social media, and times to step away.
6. **Log on** with a purpose and be mindful of that while scrolling through your feeds.
7. **Avoid** comparison, and rather look for inspiration.
8. **Think** before posting.
9. **Remember** people often share only the 'highlights' of their lives.
10. **Always** put your mental health first!

Quick reference guide for practitioners

- Are these parents at risk for mental health issues?
- Open a discussion around digital parenting and keeping themselves mentally well while using social networking sites.
- Ensure you are including social networking discussions in your wellbeing screening just as you would nutrition and exercise.
- Share information on how to access information regarding pregnancy and parenting from reputable websites and apps.
- Discuss digital literacy with parents and encourage them to ask you questions relating to their care, as well as finding information online from reputable sites.

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More than 90% of New Zealanders aged 15 and over use social media platforms.

It is important to discuss the benefits and risks of using social media.

Social networking is all about engagement, creating relationships, and communicating with others.

Credible apps and websites that offer advice and support can play a large role in encouraging users to better engage in their own healthcare.



Social media

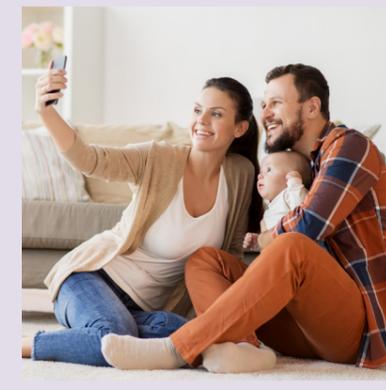
Another type of community

Social media usage has increased exponentially, with millions of people accessing social networking sites daily. The average age of those using social networking sites overlaps with the average age of those entering parenthood, so it is no surprise that there are many direct and indirect associations between the two. Parenting in the digital age brings many new challenges and benefits to parents, as well as the practitioners who care for them. By simply being aware of the risks and benefits of social networking, we can better help parents in a holistic way that addresses their whole health and wellbeing.

As health practitioners, we know that alongside the care we provide to expectant and new parents, family, friends, and others in their communities play a large role in shaping how they parent and the decisions they make. The transition to parenthood is a long-term process that begins with pregnancy and will continue for some time after the birth of their baby.

The birth of a new baby creates significant demands on family dynamics which makes the transition to parenthood one of the most stressful life events many will experience. This stage can be associated with a variety of psychological, physical, and social problems. Surviving the transition to parenthood successfully means ensuring a multi-tiered support system is in place for both parents. This may include support from family, friends, and the wider community, which can, and often does include an on-line community.

While social media and online support groups may be a source of help for new parents, they can often also make parents insecure about themselves. Raising a family can be a lot of pressure in our Instagram-happy, Pinterest-perfect culture.



PADA

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Aotearoa is the national organisation committed to eliminating the stigma around perinatal mental health in New Zealand.

We do this by championing awareness and facilitating best practice in perinatal mental health and wellbeing to ensure all families/whanau have access to appropriate information and support.

This resource is freely available to assist in raising awareness of anxiety and depression in new parents.

Thanks to Kelly Mahuika for providing the information for this resource.

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Strong social networks

The support that health care practitioners provide is direct and generally limited to our professional knowledge, whereas the social support that parents receive is often reciprocal and requires some sort of relationship. In an online world though, those relationships and the words that define them are diverse. Women who receive adequate social support are less at risk for pre-term birth, and struggle less with mental health problems. Strong, positive social networks can guard against the negative effects of mental and physical health issues. Research shows that by protecting the mother's well-being as she transitions to parenthood, you in turn safeguard the physical, mental, and social health of the babies. Today, social media affects the decisions parents make in regards to how they parent, as well as shaping their new identities as parents. Burgeoning research shows us that this can both positively and negatively affect and impact their mental health.

Pregnant women and their partners are likely to view social media and the use of mobile apps as a means to improve their pregnancies, their parenting skills, and their health outcomes. However, it is important to discuss the benefits and risks of using these platforms, just as we would other important decisions around their health care. It is a tricky area to navigate, both as a parent and as a health practitioner. It is a modern day intersection of medical advice, social media, and expectations of greater self-care, which can potentially have long term effects on our overall health and identity.

While digital health technologies - which include apps and social media platforms - are a way for healthcare providers to create new ways of health communication and health literacy, they are advertently or inadvertently forming new norms and standards of care. We can play a valuable role in strengthening social support for parents by helping them navigate the landscape of online health information through discussion and offering up to date resources that ensure parents are accessing evidence based research to make informed decisions.



It's all about engagement

Social networking is all about engagement, creating relationships, and communicating with others. It is a platform where users can build networks and online relationships. Social media websites and mobile apps are designed to allow people to share content quickly, easily and in real-time.

Most interactions on social networking sites are via mobile devices such as smartphones and other handheld devices. Social networks are important particularly for parents that don't have a strong or supportive physical community around them. Parents are confronted with making judgements about which information they should trust and act on, including details they share about themselves using digital media. Recent studies show parents often trust social media content more than other digital media content including websites.

Parents need advice on which websites and apps are reliable and up to date with evidence based research. In the age of digital parenting, we as practitioners need to ensure our clients/patients are accessing reliable websites and other digital platforms. Mobile apps and social media platforms are commonly used during the antenatal and postnatal period, providing parents with information on the transitions they are going through. These apps and websites offer advice and support around pregnancy, birth, and the newborn period. They can, and do play a large role in encouraging users to better engage in their own healthcare.

"I say this to a lot of Mums, social media is both amazing and horrific at the same time. Whilst I might find it harder because of the amount of followers I have; when I first had my children, it saved my life.

During those first months, I felt VERY alone. Family weren't readily available, and I had a very spilly and windy baby who would go through several changes of clothes a day. So I never really felt brave enough to leave the house and socialise. So I turned to the internet - in fact my Due Group on Facebook was AMAZING at helping me feel less alone.

I joined the group when I was pregnant and we formed a wonderful internet friendship. This continued on for many years afterwards as well. When I was having a down day, I'd chat to them. When I didn't know why my child was drooling all the time, I turned to them.

Of course, there is the other side of the coin - which is where the internet can be rough. It's full of people's opinions and sometimes it's hard to distinguish between an opinion and someone judging you / being nasty to you. When you're a vulnerable first time parent, it's easy to get caught up in the way you read something (rather than how it's said) and feelings can get hurt.

Maria Foy, blogger



A positive influence ...

Positive online interactions lead to a hyperawareness of the pregnancy, and can empower both parents to become active participants in their journey. Beyond shaping parental identity, social media can benefit both parents as they transition to this new phase of their life. Parents claim that information acquired via apps and social media is actually more easily accessible and more easily integrated into a busy lifestyle.

The social support can strengthen the parents' relationship and contribute to feelings of calmness, confidence, and security around childbirth and parenting. Social networking is also a form of communication that allows mothers or fathers to stay home and engage in socialisation, allowing them to feel as if their social life hasn't been compromised. It helps to create connections when there is isolation.

... or not so positive

Conversely, social media can also have the exact opposite effect on parental wellbeing. It is well documented that social media encourages us to compare not only our parenting styles, but also our lifestyles. Many parents report that they actually compare their own parenting success and what feels like failures based on what they're reading on social media. By comparing her journey to others, a mother can begin to doubt her in-built abilities to make decisions and trust her own developing parental instincts. Her self-worth can become tied to her identity as a parent, a job where she might feel she's failing because of unrealistic comparisons.

Studies suggest that making comparisons on social networking sites was related to parental role overload, lower levels of parental competence, decreased (perceived) social support, relationship outcomes, and importantly, higher levels of maternal depression.

Remember
- you are not
alone

THE NUMBER OF BIRTHS IN NEW
ZEALAND IN 2018:

58,020

THE PERCENTAGE OF PREGNANT
WOMEN WHO SUFFER FROM
DEPRESSION DURING OR AFTER
PREGNANCY:

25%

THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN WHO
DEVELOP DEPRESSION AFTER THEIR
CHILD IS BORN:

10%