



Media and stress

It's important to mark the anniversary of profoundly traumatic events, such as those of Sept. 11, 2001. But it's also a time to assess your stress levels and take some precautions to protect your mental and physical health. There are many options for limiting media consumption, lowering stress, and avoiding confrontation over politics and other controversial subjects during these periods. Keep these tips in mind:

Staying Engaged and Stress Free

Not all of us can cut media and politics out of our lives altogether, especially when it's present everywhere in our lives. But there are ways to still engage and mark the moment while keeping your stress levels in check.



Avoid Addictive Behavior

For many people, the first thing they do in the morning and the last thing they do before bed is to watch the news or scroll social media. The question is, how does this make you feel? For most people, the answer is anxious, irritated, and even irate. Now consider how this affects your mental and emotional health. If political content is raising your blood pressure and heart rate while provoking an irritable mood, you can be sure it's having an effect on your well-being. Instead of just turning on the TV or opening social media apps throughout the day, schedule your media time and then log off when your time's up. Limit your viewing to fact-based media and avoid commentary, which can be more about

emotions than useful information. Combined, these tactics should help keep your emotions, and your blood pressure, in check.



Steer Clear of Public Commentary

Given the emotionally charged nature of political disagreements, it might be best to avoid political discussions when out in public or with people you don't know well. Even seemingly innocuous comments can sometimes provoke others whose political positions differ from yours. The last thing you need to deal with is an angry outburst in a public setting. Even among friends with whom you share a political affiliation, keep the politics to a minimum. After all, they may be trying to limit their political exposure, too.



Be Open to Opposing Views

Some political conversations, such as with extended family during meals or on social media, are impossible to avoid. If you find yourself in such a situation, use the opportunity to learn about opposite points of view. If you aren't clear on a point someone is making, ask specific questions to clarify. Then give the person a chance to answer without interruption. You may learn something. Keep in mind, however, that if the conversation becomes heated or uncomfortable in any way, you are under no obligation to continue taking part in it. Try to change the subject, or excuse yourself from the table. Take the time away to calm yourself. Once you return, you may have better luck changing the topic.



Stay on Top of Your Stress

You don't have to divorce yourself completely from politics and media. Just be mindful that if you are going to engage in the process, it's likely that your stress is going to rise. So take proactive steps to manage your stress:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Get 7-9 hours of sleep a night
- Exercise at least 30 minutes a day
- Meditate or practice deep breathing techniques
- Stay socially connected with friends and family
- Get outdoors when you can



Setting Digital Limits

More than a quarter of all Americans report being on their phones scrolling social media nearly constantly during the day. That can be especially unhealthy when a traumatic event or the anniversary of a traumatic event is dominating news coverage. If you're looking to cut back on your social media and phone use, keep these tips in mind:

- **Be aware.** Pay attention to your surroundings and how you feel when you're on your phone. Did you sneak away from a date or are you hiding in the bathroom stall at work to scan your social media accounts? You may need to cut back.
- **Moderation.** Create a routine by spending only a fixed amount of time online for personal use during your day. Avoid logging on first thing in the morning and especially at night, when media usage can disrupt healthy sleep patterns.
- **Set rules.** Forcing yourself into a complete digital detox may be an impossibility, but try to set clear rules about when you won't have your phone in your hands or near you, such as when the kids come home for school, during mealtimes, or for the hour before you go to sleep.
- **Get help.** Decreasing your attachment to your phone can be a challenge, so tell family and friends what you're trying to accomplish and ask for their support. If your phone addiction is negatively impacting your physical, mental, or social health, you might consider seeking help from a therapist or support group.
- **Grab a book.** Many people seem to have forgotten that they can still obtain information without using the Internet. Put your phone away and spend a few

hours at the library or bookstore and see how it feels to flip through the pages of a book or magazine.

- **Pause before you post.** Before you hit send, stop and reflect on what you're going to share on social media. Avoid unverified news, private information, and confrontational or inappropriate remarks. Concentrate on thoughtful and encouraging posts and on engaging in meaningful conversations with like-minded people.
- **There's an app for that.** If you're struggling to turn off your phone, there are apps that can shut them down for you at pre-determined times.



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