

Staying Safe on Social Media:

A Guide for Brain Injury Recovery



What is social media?

Social media refers to websites and apps that let people share information, ideas, and messages.



It's an online community where you can post pictures, write about what you're doing or thinking, and talk to others no matter where they are. Social media includes popular sites like Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), Snapchat, TikTok, and many others.

Benefits of social media

Social media isn't just about sharing photos and updates; it offers some real advantages, especially when you're on the journey to recovery after a brain injury.

Here is why engaging on social media can be beneficial:

1. Keep in touch with friends and family easily, helping **reduce feelings of isolation** when you are in hospital.
2. **Join online groups** for those with similar experiences where you can share stories, get advice, and find encouragement.
3. Follow pages and join groups that provide **valuable tips and information** on brain health and recovery.
4. Enjoy videos, posts, and other content that can provide a welcome break and **lighten your day**.
5. Sharing your own story can be **empowering** and can also inspire others.



The challenges & risks of using social media after brain injury

While social media offers these benefits, it's important to be aware of its challenges and risks, especially when recovering from a brain injury.

Here are some important things to watch out for:

- **Feeling overwhelmed:** Sometimes, after a brain injury, it's hard to remember things or pay attention. Social media moves very fast and can make you do many things at once, which might be too much and can make you feel tired.
- **Feeling upset:** Social media might show you upsetting images or messages. This can be really tough for someone with a brain injury who might already find it hard to handle stress or strong emotions.
- **Making quick decisions:** A brain injury can make it hard to make good choices or stop and think before acting. This might lead to sharing too much personal info online or getting into arguments.
- **Feeling lonely:** Spending a lot of time on social media might lead to feeling lonely because it replaces face-to-face time with friends and family. For someone healing from a brain injury, real-world support is very important.
- **Eye strain and sleep problems:** Looking at screens for a long time can cause headaches, eye strain, and make it hard to sleep. These issues can slow down your recovery.
- **Believing false information:** It can be easier to believe false information if your injury makes it hard to think clearly. This can lead to bad decisions about your health or other important things.

Safe social media practices

Here are some key practices to help you stay safe and make the most of your online interactions:

- **Set privacy settings:** First things first, adjust the privacy settings on your social media accounts. Make sure you understand who can see your posts and personal information. Keeping your profiles private and allowing only friends or family to view your content can protect you from unwanted contact.



- **Think before you post:** Think about how each post fits with the image you wish to present on social media. If you're unsure about a post, ask someone you trust for their opinion. They can offer a second perspective.
- **Assess the environment:** Be mindful of where you are when posting. Don't post in sensitive places like hospitals or private spaces where others may not want to be included or where it might be inappropriate to share details publicly.
- **Choose connections wisely:** Be selective with social media connections. It's okay to ignore friend requests from strangers. Keeping your circle limited to trusted friends can help minimise negative experiences.
- **Stay secure:** Use strong, unique passwords for your accounts and update them regularly. Avoid writing passwords down. Instead, you might want to use a password manager app.
- **Meeting up safely:** If you make a friend online and decide to meet, choose a public place and always make sure you tell someone where you're going.
- **Manage time online:** It's easy to lose track of time on social media, which can be overwhelming. Set specific times for using social media and take regular breaks.
- **Not everything online is true:** The internet has lots of fake stories. Check different sources to get the full picture.
- **Use block and report features:** Block or report anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable or threatened.
- **Seek support if overwhelmed:** If social media becomes overwhelming, talk to someone you trust about it, such as a friend, family member, or a professional. They can offer support and help you to navigate difficult situations.
- **Educate yourself about scams:** Be aware of common scams on social media, such as fake giveaways or phishing attempts. Learning how to recognise these can prevent potential fraud.

Dealing with negative interactions online

Using social media can expose individuals, particularly those recovering from a brain injury, to challenging interactions such as cyberbullying and online drama. It's important to handle these interactions carefully.

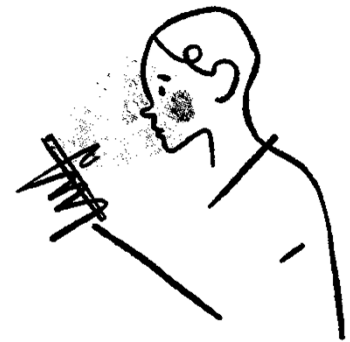
Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying involves using technology to hurt, harass, or embarrass someone else, ranging from mean comments to more aggressive online behaviour. For someone with a brain injury, these negative interactions can be particularly hurtful and may worsen stress and anxiety.

You can protect yourself by using technology wisely:

- You can use technology to your advantage **by blocking, deleting, and reporting** anyone who bullies you.
- You can also **adjust your privacy settings** to keep negative people away.
- Remember to **ask for help** if you need it; you're not alone in this.

It might be tough and take time, but don't give up. Just because technology makes it easier to bully doesn't make it okay.



Avoid online drama and trolls

Online drama happens when people respond to your posts negatively or mention you in unkind ways.

Trolls are people who intentionally stir up trouble in online discussions by posting controversial comments, just to upset others. This can lead to a flurry of mean comments, personal attacks, and sometimes even threats, which can quickly escalate as more people join in.

This is detrimental for anyone, particularly those in recovery from brain injuries. Online drama and trolls might make you feel anxious or on edge, sad, distressed, and isolated.

Here are some things you can do to de-escalate online drama:

- If you can, ignore trolls or negative comments.
- Try to respond positively or shift the conversation. Take a break from your device to avoid reacting harshly.
- If the negativity becomes overwhelming, turn off your notifications, take a break from social media and connect with friends offline.
- Support anyone being targeted by sending them encouraging messages.

- Block and report trolls to the platform and encourage others to do the same.
- If things get serious, seek help from someone you trust who can provide support and advice.

Practice tips and tools

To help make your experience on social media safer and more enjoyable after brain injury, here are some practical tips and tools:

- **Use accessibility features:** Most social media platforms offer settings that can make them easier to use. For example, you can adjust text sizes, change colour contrasts, or enable speech-to-text features to help with reading and posting. Explore these settings to find what helps you the most.
- **Bookmark helpful resources:** Keep a list of helpful blogs, websites, or videos. You might also bookmark online support groups for people with brain injury where you can connect with others who understand your experiences.
- **Set timers:** It's easy to spend more time than intended on social media. Using a timer can remind you to take breaks. Try setting a timer for 20-30 minutes when you log in, and take a break when it goes off.



Making social media a good thing in your life

These days, we often spend a lot of time online, easily getting lost in social media updates and notifications.

For someone with a brain injury, excessive screen time can lead to fatigue and overwhelm, affecting daily routines and sleep quality.

Additionally, you may find yourself becoming more upset or angry when viewing friends' posts or news on social media. It's important to keep this in mind as it can heighten feelings of stress or isolation. Fortunately, there are ways to manage how much time you spend online, such as using timers and adjusting settings on your phone.

However, it's also important to acknowledge that your phone isn't just for social media; it's a crucial lifeline to the outside world. It keeps you connected with loved ones, and provides comfort, especially if you're recovering in places like a hospital.

By finding a balance, you can make social media a beneficial part of your recovery without letting it add to your stress.

Here are some alternative uses for smartphones that can be helpful for someone recovering from a brain injury:



- **Listening to music or podcasts:** Music can be soothing and uplifting, while podcasts can offer entertainment and education without the needing to look at a screen, which is great for reducing eye strain.
- **Audiobooks and reading apps:** Listening to audiobooks or using apps that allow for text-to-speech can be a wonderful way to enjoy literature or learn new information without the fatigue of reading.
- **Mindfulness apps:** Many apps provide guided meditations, mindfulness exercises, and breathing techniques that can help reduce stress, improve focus, and help you relax.
- **Brain training games:** There are apps designed to help improve cognitive functions like memory, problem-solving, and attention. These games can be both entertaining and promote brain health.
- **Video calling:** Using video calling features like FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom helps stay connected with friends and family.
- **Health management:** There are numerous apps to track health-related data like medication schedules, sleep patterns, physical activity, and more. These can be incredibly helpful for staying organised when it comes to health and recovery.
- **Creativity:** Use apps for drawing, writing, or other creative forms which can be therapeutic and a nice break from social media.
- **Navigation and organisation:** Tools like calendars, reminders, and GPS can help manage daily tasks and appointments.









Social media holds great potential for staying connected, finding support, and enhancing your recovery journey after a brain injury. However, it's crucial to approach it with awareness and caution. By understanding the risks and implementing the safe practices outlined, you can protect yourself from the negative aspects of social media while enjoying its many benefits.

Resources for social media use after brain injury

Below are resources designed to provide support, information, and practical tools to help you use social media safely and effectively.

You can visit the websites or scan the QR codes below with the camera on your phone:

- **Headway - The Brain Injury Association:** Provides support and information to brain injury survivors, their families, and caregivers. Headway also offers a helpline and legal advice. www.headway.org.uk 
- **UK Acquired Brain Injury Forum (UKABIF):** Promotes understanding of all aspects of acquired brain injury and provides information resources for survivors. www.ukabif.org.uk 
- **Get Safe Online:** A leading source of unbiased, factual information regarding safe Internet use, covering everything from protecting children to securing devices. www.getsafeonline.org 
- **Anti-Bullying Alliance:** Offers resources and guidance to help tackle bullying in schools and online. anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk 
- **AbilityNet:** Provides free information and advice on the ways that people with disabilities can use computers and the internet. They also offer IT support services and free resources. www.abilitynet.org.uk 
- **Facebook Accessibility:** Information on using Facebook's accessibility features. www.facebook.com/help/273947702950567 
- **X Accessibility:** Tips on making the most of Twitter's accessibility settings. www.help.x.com/en/resources/accessibility 