

Screen Time & First-Episode Psychosis

Most of us spend a lot of time on phones and social media — and that's not necessarily a problem. But screen use affects people in early psychosis differently, and it's worth understanding how.

"Screens aren't the enemy — but heavy or late-night use can quietly make symptoms harder to manage. Small changes to how and when you use your phone can make a real difference."

IT'S COMPLICATED

Screens and social media aren't all bad — they can be a real source of connection and support. But heavy use at the wrong times can make things harder.

WHY IT MATTERS

Certain types of content and scrolling habits can fuel paranoia, disrupt sleep, and increase distress in ways that are especially significant in early psychosis.

WHAT HELPS

It's not about giving up your phone — it's about using it in ways that support rather than undermine how you're feeling.

WHAT'S WORTH KNOWING

- 1 Heavy screen use can fuel paranoia and distress.** Social media involves constant monitoring of what others think, say, and do — which can feed into patterns of suspicion or self-consciousness that are already heightened in psychosis.
- 2 Late-night scrolling directly disrupts sleep.** Screen use in the evening suppresses melatonin and keeps your brain aroused. For people with psychosis, poor sleep doesn't just make you tired — it actively worsens symptoms.
- 3 Distressing content can stick differently.** News, conflict, or disturbing content that might roll off someone else can feel more intense, more personal, or more threatening when you're in early psychosis. Your brain is processing things differently right now.
- 4 Screens can also help — in the right way.** Online connection, peer support communities, and mental health apps can all be genuinely useful during recovery. The goal is intentional use, not avoidance.

WHAT MIGHT HELP

SET A WIND-DOWN TIME BEFORE BED

Putting your phone away 30–60 minutes before sleep is one of the most effective things you can do. It's not about willpower — keeping the phone in another room makes it easier.

NOTICE HOW YOU FEEL AFTER SCROLLING

Some content leaves you feeling calm and connected. Some leaves you feeling worse. Paying attention to this is a good starting point — you don't have to analyze it, just notice.

CURATE WHAT YOU'RE EXPOSED TO

Muting, unfollowing, or filtering accounts and keywords that cause distress is a completely valid option. You don't owe anyone your attention online.

TALK TO YOUR TEAM ABOUT IT

If you're finding certain online experiences really upsetting — or if something online is feeding into thoughts that worry you — that's worth bringing up. It happens more than you might think.

You're allowed to log off

Taking a break from social media when things feel overwhelming isn't antisocial — it's self-care. You can reconnect when you feel ready.

Your reactions online are valid

If something you saw online upsets you, that's real, even if others don't understand why. Your nervous system is more sensitized right now, and that's not a weakness.

Connection still matters

If being online is how you stay connected with people who matter to you, that's important too. The goal isn't to have fewer connections; it's to spend better-quality time online.