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The Emotional Weight of Social Media

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- **Rupa Mehta** Founder of Nalini Method, NaliniKIDS and author of "The Nalini Method: 7 Workouts for 7 Moods"



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We've heard it time and again; our culture is obsessed with social media. It's true; screens are our lifeblood. We are relentlessly tweeting, messaging, poking, liking and engaging with each other online. We have access to information that we've never had before, and let's face it, who doesn't love a good selfie of Ellen DeGeneres at the Oscars or an ice bucket challenge or two? But the truth is that beyond becoming a habitual part of our daily lives; social media has begun to define how we feel. We create personal profiles online but we often forget that our social media presence and behavior doesn't always show who we really are, or who others are for that matter. Social media has become an important factor in our own emotional weight.

According to **Todd Leopold at CNN**, studies have show that "social media can have effects on mental health... getting 'likes' for Facebook posts actually results in a release of dopamine, a brain chemical associated with pleasure. Moreover, sad or moving posts can promote release of oxytocin, the 'love hormone,' which makes us feel protected."

It makes sense, Facebook and Twitter have become platforms for us to curate and share our successes, accomplishments and changes in life. This can contribute to our own lives in wonderful ways but it also has its challenges.

The problem is two-fold: Being dependent on the satisfaction received online can be a slippery slope. And not getting that satisfaction, and the natural problems with social media (online bullying, exclusivity and fast access to potentially emotional harmful content) can put our real life, tangible feelings at stake. There are ways to use social media effectively and enjoy it without making us feel emotionally heavy or weighed down. Here are a few of my favorite ways to help you lighten the emotional weight of social media:

Express Gratitude Online: When you log in to your Facebook I'm sure your feed is speckled with those self-promotional or celebratory posts. The: "I'm so excited to announce that..." or "I can't believe I..." posts. You know what I'm talking about. It's awesome to share successes online, it allows the word to spread quickly and as Leopold told us, it can even make you happier. But it can also be frustrating. Have you ever been having an absolutely awful day, logged into Facebook and seen a post about someone else's "fabulous" life and felt like you were going to snap? Those posts are great but are often not very helpful if you're feeling unhinged or having a hard time in your own real life.

So why don't we begin to turn it around and start to create posts that express gratitude. Why not thank someone you love for being there for you online? Send a message of appreciation or a quick hello to a family member? Write a post about the way an old teacher or mentor encouraged you. Expressing gratitude, simply saying thank you will lift your spirits while also supporting and celebrating someone else.

Take a Social Media Breather: When we depend on our phones to evade awkward situations, to curate our own life through selfies, to gain likes and pokes and comments, we lose sight of what truly is important; engaging with each other in person and enjoying our time in front of each other. Social media is important, it is relevant but I promise if you try unplugging you'll connect with your world in a deeper, long lasting way. Taking a breather also allows you to return to social media with a different perspective. You'll find more enjoyment in engaging with others digitally because you've taken the time to work on in-person relationships. You may even find that social media matters less and less to you the more time you spend focused on others in real life.

Recognize that Social Media is a Game: It isn't who we really are. People curate and choose photos and information to share that highlights exactly how they want to be seen. [Adrienne Erin](#) of Socialnomics says that, "We are all at war with one another for likes and favorites and we compete by posting pictures of our expensive dinners, vacations and social interactions." Remember those self-promoting posts I mentioned before? They are great

but they aren't actually what the world looks like. Life isn't always a steady uphill climb of happy, exciting events. But people don't want to share the mundane online because it's not as exciting. That's why it's good to remind yourself that we are all in this together. Life is beautiful because it isn't always the same. Imagine how boring your successes would be if they happened every minute of every day like they do on social media? We are all human, we all go through hardships, we all wait in line at the grocery store, and we all don't always feel awesome. But every color of life is important and unique and we all go through them. Life is so much more than a like. Enjoy social media but remember to not take it too seriously!

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