# How doom scrolling fuels anxiety and rewires the brain’s stress response



In today's hyper-connected world, the ritual of reaching for our phones first thing in the morning has become an almost universal practice. This early morning behaviour often involves engaging in what’s commonly referred to as doom scrolling, a term used to describe the compulsive consumption of negative news. The stark headlines that scream from our screens—wars, economic instability, environmental catastrophes—fuel this habit, compelling us to refresh our feeds incessantly for the latest updates.

The inclination to doom scroll is both understandable and alarming, particularly in light of the pervasive anxiety and disillusionment that many people feel in today’s societal climate. As highlighted by various experts, including Dr. Aditi Nerurkar from Harvard Medical School, our brains are not designed to cope with the ceaseless barrage of stressors we now face. She states, “Our brains and bodies are expertly designed to handle short bursts of stress. But over the past several years, the stress just doesn’t seem to end.” The amygdala, the part of our brain responsible for our fight or flight response, drives us to remain ever-vigilant, habitually scanning for threats. This unfortunately means that the more we scroll, the more we feel compelled to continue.

Research underscores the grave implications of this behaviour for our mental and physical health. Studies indicate that doom scrolling is intimately linked to increased anxiety, disrupted sleep patterns, and a heightened sense of helplessness in the face of unrelenting bleak news. Chronic stress from continuous exposure to negative content can lead to serious health issues, including hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Moreover, a review published in Applied Quality of Life in 2023 found that doom scrolling correlates with diminished life satisfaction and overall mental well-being.

In parallel to doom scrolling is another phenomenon known as zombie scrolling. This entails the mindless and compulsive scrolling through content without any real objective. While one may justify this behaviour as research or work-related, it often results in a disconnection from reality and real-life interactions. A state of mindlessness can detract from personal hygiene and meaningful social connections, leaving individuals feeling isolated even when surrounded by others.

The continuous nature of smartphone notifications can exacerbate these symptoms, contributing to what some researchers have termed “brain rot”. The brain's reward system, spurred by the release of dopamine when a promising story is clicked, reinforces this scrolling behaviour. It becomes a cycle, where individuals seek that feeling of satisfaction while grappling with the resultant stress and mental fatigue.

The escalating prevalence of doom and zombie scrolling begs the question: How can we reclaim control over our digital consumption? Experts suggest establishing firm boundaries around technology use. Simple but effective measures may include keeping phones out of reach during meals or when in company, muting notifications, and designating specific times for catching up on the news. Creating a structured approach to our digital habits can promote healthier interactions with content and help mitigate feelings of anxiety or overwhelm.

It’s essential to foster alternative activities to replace scrolling—be it engaging in hobbies, exercising, or spending time outdoors. These pursuits not only divert attention from the compulsive urge to scroll but also can invigorate mental health.

Ultimately, the key to countering the detrimental effects of doom scrolling lies in mastery over our time and digital habits. As we venture into a world increasingly shaped by technology, the onus rests on us to ensure that our phones serve us, rather than the other way around. Taking back control can not only enrich our daily experiences but can significantly enhance our overall well-being.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/doom-scrolling-6717055-May2025/), [[2]](https://www.moneycontrol.com/lifestyle/anxiety-depression-and-other-negative-effects-of-doom-scrolling-article-12795856.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/mental-health/doom-scrolling-and-mental-health//), [[4]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/its-not-just-in-your-head/202412/the-dangers-of-doom-scrolling)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.uhhospitals.org/blog/articles/2024/07/doomscrolling-breaking-the-habit), [[6]](https://www.pcworld.com/article/1681249/doom-scrolling-is-giving-you-brain-rot.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2022/3-october-what-is-doomscrolling-and-what-can-help-if-it-s-affecting-your-mental-health)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/doom-scrolling-6717055-May2025/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/lifestyle/anxiety-depression-and-other-negative-effects-of-doom-scrolling-article-12795856.html> - This article discusses the negative effects of doom-scrolling, including increased anxiety, disrupted sleep, and impaired concentration. It highlights how constant exposure to negative news can lead to chronic stress and other health issues. The piece also addresses the impact of doom-scrolling on mental health, noting that it can worsen depression and anxiety, and lead to feelings of helplessness and despair. Additionally, it mentions the physical health consequences, such as cardiovascular disease and hypertension, associated with chronic stress from doom-scrolling.
3. <https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/mental-health/doom-scrolling-and-mental-health//> - This article from the Mayo Clinic Press explores the concept of doom-scrolling and its impact on mental health. It explains how consuming negative news can lead to mood changes, increased anxiety, and disrupted sleep patterns. The piece also discusses the role of social media in reinforcing negative thoughts and feelings, and offers strategies to mitigate the effects of doom-scrolling, such as setting time limits, curating news sources, and engaging in alternative activities.
4. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/its-not-just-in-your-head/202412/the-dangers-of-doom-scrolling> - This Psychology Today article examines the adverse effects of doom-scrolling on mental health. It references studies linking doom-scrolling to worse mental well-being and decreased life satisfaction. The piece discusses how constant exposure to negative news can reinforce negative thoughts and feelings, worsen pre-existing depression and anxiety, and lead to increased stress levels. It also highlights the impact of doom-scrolling on the brain's reward system and the potential for developing addictive behaviors.
5. <https://www.uhhospitals.org/blog/articles/2024/07/doomscrolling-breaking-the-habit> - This article from University Hospitals addresses the habit of doom-scrolling and its negative impact on mental health. It explains how doom-scrolling can worsen depression and anxiety, reinforce negative thoughts, disrupt sleep patterns, and increase stress hormone levels. The piece also discusses the addictive nature of doom-scrolling, particularly among younger adults and those closely following politics, and offers tips to break the habit, such as setting time limits, curating news sources, and engaging in alternative activities.
6. <https://www.pcworld.com/article/1681249/doom-scrolling-is-giving-you-brain-rot.html> - This PCWorld article discusses the concept of doom-scrolling and its negative effects on mental health. It explains how constant exposure to negative news can increase anxiety, stress, and feelings of helplessness. The piece also highlights the impact of doom-scrolling on sleep patterns, productivity, and physical health. It discusses the brain's reward system and how social media algorithms contribute to the perpetuation of doom-scrolling habits, and offers suggestions to mitigate its effects.
7. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2022/3-october-what-is-doomscrolling-and-what-can-help-if-it-s-affecting-your-mental-health> - This article from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) explores the phenomenon of doom-scrolling and its impact on mental health. It discusses how constant exposure to negative news can lead to feelings of powerlessness and anxiety. The piece offers practical steps to mitigate the impact of doom-scrolling, such as setting time limits, using positive habit-breaking apps, reflecting on the motivations behind doom-scrolling, focusing on controllable aspects of life, and using grounding techniques.