# Experts warn doom scrolling triggers chronic stress and brain rot



What is the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning? For many, the instinctual action is to reach for their phones. This often leads to a familiar routine known as doom scrolling—endlessly scanning a barrage of alarming headlines from news outlets vying for attention with reports ranging from international conflicts and economic turmoil to adverse weather updates.

In a world filled with turmoil, the urge to doom scroll can be overwhelming. Experts warn that this habit can have detrimental effects on our physical and mental health. Dr Aditi Nerurkar, a lecturer in Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School, posits that the unrelenting nature of negative news has left us in a perpetual state of stress. “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,” she explains. This constant cycle of anxiety is compounded by the way doom scrolling triggers our amygdala—the part of the brain responsible for regulating fear and vigilance—leading us to perpetually hunt for threats in our feeds.

Research reinforces these claims, with a comprehensive review published in *Applied Research in Quality of Life* suggesting that doom scrolling correlates with poorer mental well-being and reduced satisfaction in life. This aligns with findings from *Psychology Today*, which highlights the reinforcing nature of such habits, exacerbating feelings of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, the Mayo Clinic Press notes that this behaviour can lead to heightened levels of anger and a pervasive sense of helplessness, both of which can disrupt sleep patterns and impair social interactions.

Beyond doom scrolling, the phenomenon of zombie scrolling also thrives in the digital age. This behaviour is characterised by habitual, mindless scrolling through content without intention or engagement. The distinction lies in the engagement—or lack thereof—with the content consumed, yet both behaviours share roots in a psychological quest for dopamine—the brain's pleasure chemical. As habitual scrollers, we often find ourselves caught in cycles of distraction, using technology to stave off the discomfort of silence or solitude.

Some recent considerations from *PCWorld* suggest that the continual consumption of negative content risks not just our focus and productivity but may lead to a condition aptly termed "brain rot." The constant influx of brief, emotionally charged stories erodes our capacity for enjoyment in other activities, making it increasingly challenging to seek fulfilment outside the screen.

The impacts on health are not trivial; experts report a spectrum of adverse physical effects from doom and zombie scrolling, including headaches, muscle tension, and even high blood pressure. The cognitive toll is pronounced, as these scrolling habits can significantly hinder one’s ability to concentrate and engage meaningfully with the world around them. Harvard Health has documented complaints ranging from nausea to sleep disturbances, highlighting a pressing need to reassess our relationship with digital news consumption.

However, these realities invite a constructive response. Strategies aimed at reclaiming our time and attention are essential. Dr Catherine Conlon, a public health doctor, suggests establishing digital boundaries to mitigate the adverse effects of scrolling. Recommendations include placing phones out of reach during the night and keeping them silenced and stored away during work hours or mealtimes. Switching devices to grayscale can further diminish the stimulus that prompts habitual checking, allowing for a more balanced engagement with technology.

Implementing these changes not only helps to carve out cherished moments for healthier activities—be it walks in the fresh air or genuine interactions with friends—but also empowers individuals to regain control over their digital habits. By thoughtfully moderating our consumption of news and social media, we can create a more mindful relationship with information and, ultimately, enhance our well-being.

In a world rife with negative news, it is up to us to set the pace for our mental and physical health, recognising that while the content may be unavoidable, our engagement with it remains within our control.

## Reference Map:

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

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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.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/doomscrolling-dangers> - This article from Harvard Health discusses the physical and mental health risks associated with doomscrolling, including nausea, headaches, muscle tension, low appetite, difficulty sleeping, and elevated blood pressure. It references a 2023 research review in Applied Research in Quality of Life, which analyzed three studies involving approximately 1,200 adults, suggesting that doomscrolling is linked to worse mental well-being and life satisfaction. The article also highlights the impact of doomscrolling on the brain's reward system, leading to overstimulation and difficulty engaging with the real world.
3. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/its-not-just-in-your-head/202412/the-dangers-of-doom-scrolling> - Psychology Today explores the adverse mental health effects of doomscrolling, including increased anxiety, depression, and stress. It cites a 2023 study linking doomscrolling to worse mental health and decreased life satisfaction. The article explains how doomscrolling reinforces negative thoughts and feelings, worsening pre-existing depression and anxiety. It also discusses the impact on the brain's amygdala, leading to heightened stress responses, and the potential for neuroplastic changes resulting from repetitive negative news consumption.
4. <https://mcpress.mayoclinic.org/mental-health/doom-scrolling-and-mental-health/> - Mayo Clinic Press examines how doomscrolling can negatively affect mental health, leading to increased anxiety, anger, and feelings of helplessness. The article explains that exposure to negative news can create a lens that causes individuals to focus more on stories that justify and accentuate these feelings. It also discusses how doomscrolling can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to sleep procrastination and mood dysfunction, and how it can worsen social health by reducing time spent with friends and family.
5. <https://www.moneycontrol.com/lifestyle/anxiety-depression-and-other-negative-effects-of-doom-scrolling-article-12795856.html> - Moneycontrol highlights the significant negative effects of doomscrolling on mental and physical health, including increased anxiety, disrupted sleep, and impaired concentration. The article explains that constant exposure to negative news can lead to a state of hyper-vigilance, contributing to chronic stress. It also discusses how doomscrolling can worsen mood, lead to feelings of helplessness and depression, and impair concentration and productivity. Additionally, it addresses the physical health consequences, such as cardiovascular disease and hypertension.
6. <https://www.pcworld.com/article/1681249/doom-scrolling-is-giving-you-brain-rot.html> - PCWorld discusses how doomscrolling can negatively impact the brain's reward system, leading to brain rot. The article explains that the constant stream of negative news and social media content can alter the brain's reward system, making it harder to feel pleasure and motivation from other activities. It also outlines the consequences of doomscrolling, including increased anxiety, depression, insomnia, decreased productivity, and physical health issues. The article emphasizes the importance of taking breaks from doomscrolling and engaging in other activities to support mental health.
7. <https://www.uhhospitals.org/blog/articles/2024/07/doomscrolling-breaking-the-habit> - University Hospitals provides insights into the unhealthy habit of doomscrolling, particularly among younger adults and those closely following politics. The article discusses how doomscrolling can worsen depression and anxiety, reinforce negative thoughts, disrupt sleep, and increase stress hormone levels. It also explains how doomscrolling can become addictive, activating the release of dopamine in the brain, and offers strategies to scroll responsibly, such as setting time limits, curating social media content, practicing mindful scrolling, and prioritizing healthier activities.