

Social media and brain changes

The pros and cons of social media are well documented. It allows you to connect with friends and pursue passions, but bullying and misinformation can be rampant.

But can frequent social media use lead to changes in brain development during the formative adolescent years? A [recent study](#) suggests so, but much more investigation is needed, says [Karna Sherwood, MD](#), a neurologist at OSF HealthCare in Alton, Illinois.

The study tracked 169 sixth and seventh graders and found those who habitually checked social media were more sensitive to rewards and punishments. To view it a different way, kids who constantly refresh Facebook hoping the likes on their post will go up may be more impulsive to seek out real-life recognition.

“At a certain point, 10 likes or 20 likes are no longer gratifying enough,” Dr. Sherwood says. “And then you have to find another way to get even more likes or more appreciation.”

That “another way” could lead to risky behaviors such as substance abuse. But Dr. Sherwood says more study is needed to conclusively make the link. Just how much does our life in the digital realm affect our life away from the device?

“A follow up study would certainly investigate if [frequent social media use] has an effect on rates of anxiety and depression,” says Dr. Sherwood. “Could this affect addiction? And what interventions could be taken to nullify those behaviors?”

“As a society, if we want to raise happy and healthy people in an age where we are getting better technologically, what steps do we need to take?”

Until then, Dr. Sherwood has some good advice no matter your age or number of Twitter followers.

“Until you get the rest of the information, it’s better to have some degree of regulation,” and restraint with social media, Dr. Sherwood says.

Learn more about how the brain works on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).