

A diet of social media: Are you using technology or is it using you?

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RDN, LD, Head Start Consulting Nutritionist

As part of my role as consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. I recently had the joy and privilege of reader feedback with a request to address the topic of social media. Contained in this Head Start parent's email were many useful links for information (provided below). This topic is huge and warrants multiple articles. In this issue, I compare social media to food choices, while exposing concern(s). Of course, as a nutritionist, this feels more like I am keeping within my scope of practice. It also serves to remind us, however, that we make thousands of choices every day. When we are conscious of our choices, our outcomes are much more likely to help, rather than harm.

The most compelling question around social media is: Am I using technology or is it using me? This is similar to how we might make food selections. Do these foods benefit me (and my health) or am I responding to cravings or suggestions that benefit someone else (such as an influential company that profits by my purchase)?

As an evaluation tool, it is also useful to ask, "How do I feel after using technology? Is this something I want to be doing?" These questions are especially appropriate when looking at gaming or activities that frequently hold our attention in ways where we (or our children) lose time.

Similarly, there are foods that are difficult to stop eating until gone or the bag is empty. How do we feel when we eat a bag of chips or a bag of cookies or candy? These behaviors resemble addiction.

When you or your children can identify that, after using social media, you "feel less happy," perhaps you are serving technology vs. technology serving you. In asking whether our addictive foods bring us happiness (or not), we need to look beyond the "high" to include how we feel later.

In social media, there is a misalignment of goals. The designers of social media know that people spend less time on social media when it brings "happiness" (or satisfaction) and people spend more time on activities that result in feeling "unhappy" (looking for satisfaction).

Algorithms are created with data gathered from your social media behavior to hold your attention. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, an algorithm is a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer.

They are designed with goals that are not aligned with your well-being. Not all users see the same messages because our "clicks" feed into the algorithms to create what we are shown.

In reverse, we can train social media (to a degree) by how we feed it (how we respond based on our responses (clicks). Who do you want to be in charge of your life (and your children's lives) – you or the algorithm?

Communication is a lifelong endeavor. It's more than making an announcement and getting "likes." Further, it's very easy to miscommunicate over text without the benefit of feeling or seeing body language. Additionally, "voice-to-text" apps are notorious for changing what was actually said and increasing the likelihood of misunderstanding.

It's important to know what types of communication to text or to reserve for conversation in person or on the phone. Perhaps we can think of this as "communication quality" in the same way we look at fast food vs. a meal cooked with intention and love as "food quality."

As with eating in a rush vs. in the company of family, the benefits of nourishment are magnified when shared with love and fellowship. For our well-being, we need balance. Breaks from our devices allow us to be present with others, or to play or to restore ourselves in nature.

The links below outline issues with social media in much greater detail. They also offer suggestions, as well as a pledge to "Wait until 8th," meaning let children wait until the eighth grade for social media (like the social media executives seem to be choosing for their own children).

Please take the time to peruse the links – especially the 45-minute video for students by Max Stossel of Center for Humane Technology. He is a former designer who incidentally grew up as a gamer. He explains design logic to inform and to empower students to make their own decisions (vs. responding to the choices made for them).

What do we want for our steady diet? We need the guidance provided by Tribal elders who are steeped in wisdom from observing tradition and history. With the social media phenomena there is little history to guide us. The links provided expose the model as "taking away our choice(s)."

My personal bias is that the time is now, in 2020, to take back our personal choice. Let's be brave and not cowardly. As shared by a concerned Head Start parent, "There is value in organizations that get parents talking to each other about these topics. It's time that we have more information and more conversations with other parents."

In summary, the current programming and design of social media intentionally

overwhelm who we are and downgrade us to take away our freewill. We become a "voodoo doll" via a recommendation system that is driven by our clicks.

The algorithms study our behavior with data mining, which is fed back to us via suggested words to further shape how we spend our time, our views and ultimately our choices (which may not match what we would otherwise choose).

Perhaps our greatest mission is to "know ourselves" and to empower our children to do the same. Social media bids us to ask: How well do we know ourselves? How is it that artificial intelligence can hold our attention by knowing our impulses better than we do? Who is in charge?

The risks associated with electronic communications are far greater than just social media algorithms. There are clearly many additional health impacts and issues with electromagnetic exposure from devices and from Wi-Fi, proximity to routers, smart meters, cell towers, 5-G and more.

Siletz Tribal Head Start offers nutritional support at no cost to Head Start families. Nutritional support is a family issue and includes lifestyle behaviors (i.e., social media). Support, or consultation, usually occurs over the telephone. If you have questions or nutrition concerns about your Head Start child, please contact your teacher or the director and ask to speak to the nutritionist.

Resources

- Take the pledge Wait until 8th – wait-until8th.org
- Center for Humane Technology – humanetech.com/parents-students/
- Portland-area psychologist Dr. Doreen Dodgen-Magee, wrote the book *Devised* – doreendm.com/
- START parent blog on the issue and a curriculum program – westartnow.org
- Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood – commercialfreechildhood.org/resources/
- The documentaries *Screenagers* and *the Like Movie* – screenagersmovie.com/tech-talk-tuesdays and thelike-movie.com/resources-directory/

Please come and join us!

Siletz Valley Charter School; In the Big Gym

March 21, 2020

Round Dance 7 p.m.



Youth Prevention Summit; please contact Felisha Howell for more info

felisha.howell@lincoln.k12.or.us | 541-444-1100

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FEB. 23RD

WSU - PULLMAN CAMPUS - BEASLEY

WSU VS USC WOMEN'S GAME 11:30AM
LUNCH 1:30-2:15PM
SPORTS SUMMIT 2:30 - 4:00PM
KEYNOTE BY MACK STRONG, SEAHAWK

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