

# What to know about using TikTok as a mental health resource

**T**ikTok, the social media app known for its short-form videos, has been one of the most popular social media platforms in the United States since 2018.

But it was during the pandemic that TikTok skyrocketed to superstardom, with a reported 850 million downloads worldwide during 2020. TikTok has now become a platform for thousands of healthcare professionals, including psychiatrists, therapists, and mental health advocates, who use the app's widespread reach to talk to audiences about everything from depression to ADHD.

Barriers for mental health In 2020 52.9 million Americans lived with mental illness. That's nearly one in five adults. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, any mental illness (AMI) is defined as a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder. It can range from no impairment to mild, moderate, and even severe.

Still, with such a high percentage of people living with mental health issues, there are many barriers to seeking and obtaining mental health for Americans. A 2021 study sampled 50,103 adults, of which 95.6% reported at least one barrier to healthcare access. Some of the barriers reported included approachability, meaning not having a place that one usually goes to when they are sick or need advice; availability, meaning lack of ability to get an appointment or find an open office; and affordability, meaning cost per session.

Because of these barriers, only about half of Americans who live with mental health issues receive mental health services. According to Pew Research, 85 percent of Americans own a smartphone. There has never been more access to information than there has been right now, including access to apps like TikTok and the content shared on its platform. Because of this widespread accessibility and the fact that mental health illness has increased so dramatically over the course of the pandemic, it's not a surprise why experts and advocates have taken to TikTok to amplify information on how

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best to address mental health. "A clear benefit is accessibility of information — TikTok is a free service that anyone with internet access can utilize," said Naomi Torres-Mackie, PhD, a psychologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York. Lindsay Fleming, a licensed therapist, is one particular mental health expert who has harnessed TikTok to reach a wide audience. She had been leading a middle school girls group but had to cancel the group sessions because of COVID-19. "Some of the participants reached out about how they missed the group, so I created a TikTok to help support my community, and one of my videos went viral," she said. "Then I started to see the impact the videos I created had on others. Many



people were struggling, but connecting with TikTok helped them feel less alone and find the courage to ask for help not only from my videos but many other mental health advocates and therapists on TikTok." Fleming connects with people on TikTok and builds a community through her videos that focus on the nuances of therapy. She also hosts weekly "lives" (or live sessions) where she does a check-in and answers questions that her community may have. Over time, her account has grown to reach more than half a million followers — a testament to how many people out there are looking for a way to connect.

"We often talk about the importance of therapy, but also what a therapy session actually looks like. We talk

about the funny, relatable, and bigger helpful moments in therapy."

Drawbacks of TikTok for mental health As with anything else on the internet, verification is the number one drawback to using TikTok, or any social media, for something as important as mental health.

Who are the professionals on the other side of the screen, and are they who they say they are? Just as important, is the advice they give trusted and clinically proven? Mental health is not something to be taken lightly or flippantly, and just because someone may have a platform to share their advice does not necessarily mean that it is expertise. "A major downside is that information on TikTok can be false, misleading, or confusing," said Torres-Mackie. "Even when valid information is presented without context as it often is on social media, it can lead to false conclusions. Say, for example, a clinician on TikTok discusses a symptom of ADHD that you experience. Without the full context of all the clinical criteria of ADHD and a diagnostic exam, it is impossible to know if you truly have the condition." Be aware that there are countless people on social media without formal mental health training or with training in another area of expertise who speak on topics about which they are not fully informed. It can be easy to take some information or advice that is presented online and apply it to yourself in a way that is inaccurate.

Torres-Mackie also reminds us that being on social media itself can be damaging to mental health. "If you are opening social media apps to get mental health information, there's a high likelihood you will drift to other content that is not supportive of mental wellbeing."

How to find mental health help on TikTok (or elsewhere) While TikTok may not be the first place that mental health professionals would suggest potential patients go for help, it is undeniable that the accessibility is compelling and certainly can open doors to more tra-

## Infertility and miscarriage may increase women's risk of stroke, study shows

**C**harles Gullung/Getty Images As many as 12.2 million strokes occur each year — about half of which occur in women — but an estimated 80% of all strokes can be prevented by reducing risk factors.

A recent study shows that women who've experienced infertility, miscarriage, and stillbirth are at a higher risk for both non-fatal and fatal stroke later in life.

The findings suggest that a greater frequency of miscarriages and stillbirths increases the risk.

While infertility and pregnancy loss may not be preventable, genetic factors or endocrine disruptions may help explain the association with increased stroke risk, according to the research. Further research in this field will help us better understand why infertility, pregnancy loss, and stroke may be linked to help re-

duce stroke risk and improve treatments for infertility and pregnancy loss. A stroke is the result of the brain being starved of oxygen and nutrient-rich blood. This may occur because of a blockage (ischemic stroke) or burst blood vessel (hemorrhagic stroke).

A stroke is a medical emergency. The sooner a person receives treatment, the better their chances of recovery. Globally, there are over 12.2 million Trusted Source new strokes each year, and it's estimated that 101 million people currently living have experienced a stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Trusted Source, stroke is a major cause of disability and a leading cause of death in the United States.

Because women tend to live longer than men, they have a higher lifetime stroke risk than men. As many as 1 in 5 women

ages 55 to 75 experience a stroke. To understand sex-specific factors contributing to stroke, new research published in June 2022 in the British Medical Journal shows that women who've experienced infertility, miscarriage, or stillbirth may have an increased risk of stroke. Is biological sex a risk factor for stroke?

Prior evidence has shown that the combined oral contraceptive pill Trusted Source and hormonal factors during pregnancy Trusted Source have been linked to increased stroke risk. What the new research shows The BMJ paper, led by Dr. Gita Mishra, a professor of Life Course Epidemiology at the University of Queensland, drew together data from eight long-term large studies that had been conducted in seven countries (Australia, China, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States). —AFP



## Long Covid: Disrupted sleep, fatigue common months after infection



**R**esearchers at the Cleveland Clinic found that nearly two-thirds of people are fatigued, and about half experience sleep disruption months after an acute COVID-19 infection. Moderate-to-severe sleep disruption is three times more common among Black people after recovering from COVID-19. Anxiety is also linked to increased long COVID sleep disruption. The study emphasizes the need to characterize race-specific determinants and disparities in COVID-19 survivors.

All data and statistics are based on publicly available data at the time of publication. Some information may be out of date. Visit our coronavirus hub for the most recent information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Trouble sleeping and fatigue are among the often-reported symptoms of the condition known as "long COVID." New research from the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio presents the findings of researchers investigating sleep issues in people who have recovered from COVID-19.

According to the research, nearly half of those who recovered from COVID-19 experience at least moderate sleep issues. The research was presented in June at Sleep 2022, a meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, a joint venture of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) and the Sleep Research Society (SRS).

There is a risk of developing long COVID even for

the vaccinated, and researchers suggest the condition can persist for years for some people. The researchers analyzed the experiences of 962 Cleveland Clinic Recover Clinic patients between February 2021 and April 2022. The individuals filled out the sleep disturbance and fatigue questionnaire sections of the National Institutes of Health's Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS).

The clinic found that its Black patients were more than three times more likely to have moderate-to-severe sleep disturbances after recovering from COVID-19. Another factor that was associated with a higher than average incidence of sleep disturbance was anxiety.

After factoring for age, race, sex, and body mass index, the analysis concluded: After recovery from COVID-19, 41.3% of patients reported at least moderate sleep disturbances, and 8% described severe sleep issues. than two-thirds of patients (67.2%) reported moderate fatigue. Lead study author Dr. Cynthia Pena Orbea tells Sleep 2022: "Our study suggests that the prevalence of moderate to severe sleep disturbances is high and that [the] Black race confers increased odds to suffer from moderate to severe sleep disturbances, highlighting the importance to further understand race-specific determinants of sleep disturbances in order to develop race-specific interven-

## Personalised pain medication: Why is it necessary?

**P**ain conditions are leading contributors to disability worldwide. Despite this, treatments vary in efficacy between individuals, and some carry a high potential for misuse. Personalized pain medicine is an emerging field that aims to produce safe and effective treatments tailored to individual needs. Around 1.71 billion people Trusted Source live with a pain- or musculoskeletal-related condition globally. These include lower back pain, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia. Such conditions are linked to worse mental health and well-being measures, increased work absenteeism, and productivity losses.

Treatment options for pain depend on severity. Milder forms of pain may be treated with over-the-counter drugs such as acetaminophen or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), including aspirin and ibuprofen.

If these drugs fail to provide relief, doctors may prescribe muscle relaxants such as diazepam, NSAIDs such as celecoxib, or steroid treatments like dexamethasone. Aside from these, doctors may also offer opioids, including codeine, fentanyl, and oxycodone, for short-term use.

While each of these drugs is widely used for pain relief, their varied effects Trusted Source and safety profiles have inspired patients and researchers alike to search for more personalized treatment options.

Why personalization is important "Our currently available pain management therapeutics are essentially one-size-fits-all. For most pain, we treat it with NSAIDs or opioids," Dr. Cynthia Renn, professor of pain and translational symptom science at the University of Maryland, told Medical News Today. "There haven't been any re-

ally transformative analgesic discoveries since the identification of the opioids."

"The NSAIDs and opioids work with more or less efficacy to treat pain from various origins. We know that the one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for everyone, given that two people with seemingly the same injury suffer pain differently; some will recover quickly with minimal pain while others will go on to develop chronic pain," she pointed out. When asked why some analgesics may work in some and not others, Dr. Kevin Boehnke, a research investigator in the Department of Anesthesiology and the Chronic Pain and Fatigue Research Center at the University of Michigan, explained that there are two key factors. The first, he noted, is "genetics and metabolism." He explained: "People metabolize medications at different rates. —AFP

