



Doomscrolling and News Anxiety: How to Stay Informed Without Spiralling

An explainer and media boundaries planner · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)
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At a glance

- Your brain is wired to pay attention to threat, and news feeds are built to keep you scrolling.
- Heavy exposure to distressing news can raise stress, even when events are far away.
- You can stay informed and protect your mental health with a few clear boundaries.

Why we can't stop scrolling

"Doomscrolling" is the habit of continuing to scroll through bad news even when it makes you feel worse. It isn't a lack of willpower. Our brains evolved to pay close attention to threats, because noticing danger kept our ancestors alive. Social media and news apps use endless feeds and notifications that keep that system switched on.

The result can be a constant, low-level alarm: feeling anxious, helpless, angry, or numb, without any action you can take.

What the research says

After the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, people who consumed six or more hours of related media a day reported higher acute stress than some people who were directly at the event (Holman, Garfin & Silver, 2014).

Researchers have warned that repeated media exposure during crises such as COVID-19 can amplify anxiety and stress responses (Garfin, Silver & Holman, 2020).

Signs news is affecting you

- Checking the news first thing in the morning and last thing at night
- Feeling worse after scrolling, but continuing anyway
- Trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Feeling hopeless, irritable, or on edge about the world
- Losing track of time on your phone

Healthy news habits

- **Choose times, not triggers.** Check news at set times instead of whenever you're bored or anxious.
- **Pick a few trusted sources.** Reputable outlets give context. Endless feeds give volume.
- **Prefer reading to watching.** Graphic images and videos tend to be more distressing than text.
- **Turn off breaking news alerts.** Very little news requires you to know within minutes.
- **Protect your bookends.** Keep the first and last 30 minutes of your day screen-free.
- **Turn concern into action.** Donate, volunteer, contact a representative, or check in on someone. Action eases helplessness.

Tool: My Media Boundaries Planner

My plan	My answer
How I feel after scrolling now (0–10 distress):	
When I'll check news (times of day):	
How long I'll spend (minutes):	
My trusted sources:	
Apps or alerts I'll turn off or limit:	
Screen-free times or places (e.g., bedroom, meals):	
What I'll do instead when I feel the urge to scroll:	
One meaningful action I can take about what concerns me:	

Seven-day check-in

Day	Minutes on news	Mood after (0–10)	What I noticed
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			

Day	Minutes on news	Mood after (0–10)	What I noticed
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

When to reach out for support

If news-related anxiety is affecting your sleep, work, or relationships, or world events connect to your own experiences of loss or trauma, a therapist can help you process those feelings and build healthier habits.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Garfin, D. R., Silver, R. C., & Holman, E. A. (2020). The novel coronavirus (COVID-2019) outbreak: Amplification of public health consequences by media exposure. *Health Psychology*, 39(5), 355–357.

Holman, E. A., Garfin, D. R., & Silver, R. C. (2014). Media's role in broadcasting acute stress following the Boston Marathon bombings. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(1), 93–98.

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