



CONCERN:EAP

Healthy & Resilient You



IS SOCIAL CONTAGION RUNNING YOUR LIFE?

FOMO NO MORE



Picture it: You've committed yourself to healthier eating, so you spend your entire Sunday buying groceries

and meal-prepping lunches and snacks for the upcoming workweek.

You can do this! Then, come Monday, you're in the breakroom about to take your beautiful salad out of the community fridge, when you hear, "Who wants burgers?!" Before you know it, you're plowing through a double cheesy-beefy delight plus fries and a side of fried pie with the IT team.



WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

If this story sounds like we took a page out of your life, you might have been a victim of social contagion.

Social Contagion: Just How Susceptible Are We?

"Social contagion?" you ask. "But I don't even work in IT. How could I catch burger fever from them?" Though burger fever isn't real, social contagion is, and it can apply to everyone, in- or outside the IT department. In fact, recent research shows that it can spread between acquaintances and strangers just as it can between friends.



SOCIAL CONTAGION:

the spread of emotions, thoughts or behaviors between persons, groups, or across media.

AKA:

Behavioral Contagion, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or Keeping Up with the Joneses.



To grasp just how effective social contagion is at altering our behaviors (despite our best-laid plans and intentions), let's consider a couple of studies. One out of Stanford University found that 30% of airline passengers are more likely to buy in-flight upgrades (movies, snacks, etc.) if their neighbor does. Another, called the Framingham Heart Study, found that participants were 57% more likely to become overweight when friends gained weight, and 20% more likely to gain weight when friends of friends gained weight.

When social contagion steers us in the wrong direction, it can lead us down a road to overspending, financial troubles, poor health and lifestyle choices, and even anxiety and depression. But before you escape to Walden Pond to live the life of a FOMO-free hermit, remember: being plugged into a social network comes with many benefits. And, in some instances, social contagion can encourage us to adopt healthy habits, and increase our happiness levels.

Making Social Contagion Work for You



Know and honor your values: Make a list of what's truly important to you – e.g., family, strong relationships, better health, saving for travel or a home. The better you know your list, the more likely you'll be to stick to your long-term goals and avoid the snares of more in-the-moment gratifiers.



Pause and be grateful: Gratitude practices can help us curb longing for something “bigger and better” by focusing on the great things we already have. Not only can gratitude help us be more resilient to the downside of social contagion, but it is also good for our mental and physical wellbeing.



Be critical about buying: Before making purchase decisions—especially big ones—take a little time to think about why and what you want to buy. Will it make your life easier or better in the long run? Will it set you back on other financial goals?



Surround yourself with the like-minded: Since social contagion can help us achieve positive or healthy goals, consider building a support network designed to promote just that. For example, if you want to move more, find (or start) a group at work to walk with during lunch.



Practice saying “No:” Sometimes it's hard to avoid social contagion because we're not sure how to say no. So, while prepping that delicious salad at home, practice a few ways you can politely decline an offer to go for burgers. For instance, “I'm doing my best to eat fresh foods from home, but if you want to bring your burger back to the break room, it'd be great to eat together and catch up.”

Like other mindfulness exercises, these techniques should get easier the more you practice them, helping make it second nature to say no to FOMO.

For even more ways to help cultivate mindfulness and resilience in 2018, visit the Resilience Hub™ at www.ConcernResilienceHub.com regularly. First time users may be asked to enter their company ID.

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If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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