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Oh no! I've got FOMO (fear of missing out)! ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have really bad FOMO... and I hate it. How do I get over this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

OMG, LOL, FOMO... it might sound like just another cutesy acronym, but anyone experiencing FOMO — or, **fear of missing out** — knows that it can feel like the opposite of laughing out loud (LOL). The acronym FOMO is relatively new on the emotional health scene and is closely tied to social media, but the concept is as old as time itself. It has to do with the perception that other people are having interesting, fun, or exciting experiences and that you're missing out or being left out. This might leave you feeling lonely, jealous, inadequate, or sad. The first step to overcoming FOMO might be to simply remember that people tend to only show their best self to others, especially on the internet. While other people's lives might seem bright, shiny, and exciting from the outside, everyone has their own peaks and valleys; your experiences are just as valuable and unique as anyone else's!

These days, FOMO can often be triggered when people are on social media overload. For example, it can understandably be difficult to scroll through picture after picture of your friends on the beach while you're sitting in a dark, windowless classroom for hours on end. FOMO is still a pretty new research topic, but some FOMO researchers have found that people who experience frequent and intense feelings of missing out tend to be more connected to social media. They may also be more extrinsically motivated — for example, studying for a test because they want a good grade rather than because they're passionate about the material. For college students in particular, transitioning to a new environment with new people might bring some of these behaviors or feelings to the surface.

While FOMO isn't actually diagnosable — and there are no real treatments — it can nonetheless feel distressing. But, never fear! Whether excessive exposure to social media is the cause or whether it's just all that chatter around the proverbial water cooler, there are a few ways you can start to turn the tables on FOMO:

- **Do you.** In other words, be yourself! Consider making a list of people who make you happy and how you enjoy spending your time. Do you prefer to stay in and bake cookies over going to a party? Or would you rather go to a museum than to a concert? It's okay if you don't have the same experiences as everyone else, as long as what you're doing makes *you* happy!
- **Look out for the green-eyed monster (also known as jealousy).** Some research suggests that constantly tracking what other people are doing on social media might increase jealousy, which may then increase feelings of depression or the feeling that life is unfair.
- **Take it one day at a time.** If your FOMO seems to be related to a recent transition — going to college, moving to a new place, etc. — remember to give yourself a little time and space to adjust. You might doubt whether you made the right choice, or if you'll make friends; you may even question whether you'll succeed. These are all common feelings, and some research suggests that FOMO amongst college students might be related to the desire to be autonomous or feel competent in a new environment. As you settle into your new space (literally and figuratively), feelings of jealousy, inadequacy, or anxiety about missing out may start to fade.
- **Give social media (and your phone) a rest.** Technology is great for connecting us with others, but constantly being connected can also lead to anxiety. A good rule of thumb is to spend more time with friends and family in the real world than in the virtual world. An idea you may consider is to set aside just one or two hours a day where you don't look at or check any email, social media, or other technology.
- **Plan an adventure.** Whether you decide to spend a semester abroad or just try a new cuisine for lunch, consider finding ways to push yourself out of your comfort zone or beyond just the typical day-to-day happenings. Rather than feeling bummed about missing out on other people's exciting lives, you can focus on making your own life exciting [2] — in little or big ways!

If you feel your FOMO is troubling you and affecting your well-being, you can always reach out to a mental health professional, a trusted friend, or mentor to talk through what you're feeling. You might find that building your arsenal of social support and mental health resources helps you feel more satisfied with your own life and experiences.

Although it might take some getting used to, here's to turning your fear of missing out to "fulfillment of my own!"

Alice!

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Published date:

Dec 04, 2015

Last reviewed on:

Feb 07, 2020

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