



To Post ? Or Not To Post

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 Social networks are a place for conversations about what's for dinner, animal pictures or funny videos that have gone viral, to name a few. Social networking is an essential tool and can play a vital role in connecting with peers when you have an illness.

When I first started connecting on Facebook, it was refreshing to know at the click of a mouse I could be in touch with a number of people who would understand what I was going through. Online friends can make a difference! Sharing and reading stories of others who have gone through the same experiences helped me process a gazillion feelings about this roller coaster ride that is the CKD journey.

Social networking has been a lifesaver for so many that I wish it didn't have a downside. I read a book recently called **Future Crimes** by Mark Goodman which explores that downside. It made me think about my risk of exposure to cyber-crime, and about how I can try to protect myself from hackers, spammers, virus writers, and identity thieves.

10 Tips to help protect yourself:

1 Don't let a private conversation become public. For instance, you tell a friend on the phone you are in the hospital and they post that on your FB page and ask if you are better. Suddenly people know you are not well, and not at home. Not fun! Be mindful of the personal privacy concerns of others and even of your own children/relatives. Let friends know if you want to keep health news and hospitalizations "off-line."

2 Always type in the address of your social networking site. Hackers are becoming savvier and can put up duplicate pages. You think you accidentally signed out, and re-enter your password information. Don't trust, verify.

3 Be selective about who you confirm as a friend. Dummy pages and identities have been created and these have friended people to collect data from posts. Password information is sometimes derived from your pet's picture and name, or your birth date or anniversary. Vacation pictures will show when you are not home.

4 Understand the privacy policy (if that is possible) of the network you are using or get familiar with its available privacy settings. Most social networking sites monitor content that people post and place it in an algorithm for their own use; working in a free and open cloud environment means your work doesn't belong to you. If J.K. Rowling had written her Harry Potter series in Google Docs it would not be hers!

5 Posting health information has benefits, but be aware that some employers are requiring applicants to give them access to personal social network sites. If you are going to be in the job market, you may want to create another account or limit your posts about health issues.

6 Be cautious when you click on links that are in messages from your friends on your social website. Treat links in messages like you would links in e-mail messages. They could contain a virus.

7 Social networking sites offer third-party applications for download that let you do more with your personal pages. Criminals can use these applications to steal information. Take the same safety precautions that you take with any other program or file you download.

8 Be aware that if a networking site asks you to send your friends a request to "connect" and you say yes that it will pull all your contact information into its database.

9 Don't use the name of a pet or something you commonly post about as a password. Use upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols and change passwords every 6 months. Use different passwords for different sites. If you have only one password, all your accounts might get hacked if just one is compromised! Write your passwords down on a piece of paper. Don't email them to yourself.

10 Search Google for your name periodically so that you can check to see what information is available to the public and make sure nobody has taken your identity.

The number of social networking sites is exploding. Social networking leaves a trail of personal information and unfortunately the number of cybercrimes is increasing.

Remember, if you would not post a comment on the front page of a newspaper, think twice of about posting it on the internet. Online comments and photos live forever.

Lori Hartwell, Founder & President of Renal Support Network (RSN), was diagnosed with kidney disease at the age of two. In 1993 she founded RSN to instill "health, happiness and hope" into the lives of those affected by chronic kidney disease. Lori is also the author of the inspirational book **Chronically Happy: Joyful Living in Spite of Chronic Illness** and is a four-time kidney transplant recipient.