LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Welcome to *12 Degrees*, the podcast that offers real life strategies for nurturing full-spectrum wellness. I'm Lindsay Whissel Fenton.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm Christina Lightner.

DESHNA NAGAR: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Together, we explore the twelve areas of wellness that influence how we feel and function.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: We share our own personal experiences and the research-backed strategies we find helpful and give thoughts for how you can adapt them for your life.

DESHNA NAGAR: We want to empower you to make informed choices across the full spectrum of wellness. In this episode, we're going to be looking at the digital degree of wellness and what we can do, both at the individual level and the community level, to support it. Christina, get us started. What is digital wellness?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Digital wellness isn't just about screen time. It's about how we relate to technology and a way that supports our mental health, our productivity, and our relationships. Ultimately, digital wellness is about using technology in service of your life, not letting it take over.

DESHNA NAGAR: And, Christina, you literally wrote the book on this, so we have lots to learn from you.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Well, I didn't write the book, but I did contribute to a chapter on digital wellness for an in-press textbook called *Twelve Keys to Health, Happiness, and Well-Being for Nurses and the Healthcare Workforce*.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, we're not going to let you downplay that. It's a big deal. And we're going to model good wellness on this podcast and celebrate wins. So, good job, Christina.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, you're more badass than you think, Christina.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Thank you both. And in the spirit of badass, we like to subvert expectations a bit on this podcast. So instead of jumping right into how digital wellness connects with mental health and emotional wellness, let's start by exploring how this degree of wellness affects our physical health.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yes. And the first thing that comes to mind is posture. My brother is a physical therapist, so I have had plenty of lectures on the damage technology use can do to our bodies. Most of us are spending hours hunched over screens, whether

that's our phones, laptops, or tablets. And this can lead to what's often called tech neck. That forward head posture strains the muscles in your neck and shoulders. And over time, it can contribute to tension headaches, or even chronic pain. And that can contribute to other health issues down the line.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Definitely. And speaking of physical strain, let's talk about movement. It's so easy for us to spend hours at a desk or scrolling on our phone without even realizing how long we've been sitting. This kind of sedentary behavior can really impact circulation, joint health, and even our energy levels. Building in movement breaks, even just standing up and stretching, can make a big difference.

DESHNA NAGAR: There was actually a case recently where a 35-year-old man started experiencing severe burning pain in his thigh, especially at night and after long periods of sitting. It was interfering with his work and sleep, but his neurological exam came back normal. And he didn't have any underlying conditions like diabetes either. It turns out the problem was his phone. He had been carrying it in his front pants pocket for 8 to 10 hours a day. And that constant pressure was compressing a nerve in his thigh, a condition called meralgia paresthetica. Once he stopped keeping his phone there, his symptoms cleared up within a month.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Wow, Deshna, that's a great reminder that even small, everyday tech habits, like where we keep our phone, can have a real impact on our physical wellness.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, tech can definitely take a toll on our bodies. I've actually had a few rounds of tennis elbow myself, and it's usually when I've been doing a lot of prolonged video editing or audio editing. And let me tell you, it's not fun. I'm still figuring out prevention strategies, but honestly, I've mostly been in reactive mode. Treating it when it flares up but not doing much to stop it from happening in the first place. So, it's definitely not a sustainable, long-term strategy.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, that's something you really want to get ahead of. One way to help is by setting up our space with ergonomics in mind. So, basically, working in a way that keeps our body in better alignment. So, hips, shoulders, ears—all stacked. There are tools that can make a big difference, like ergonomic chairs, adjustable desks, and laptop stands that can bring our screen to eye level.

DESHNA NAGAR: And it's not just computers. I came across a video recently that raised some concerns about how devices like smartwatches might affect things like natural movement patterns or posture. To be clear, I haven't found peer-reviewed research that confirms those specific claims, but I do think it's worth paying attention to how these devices are shaping our behavior.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, well, let's talk about phone radiation for a second because it's one of those digital wellness topics that doesn't always get the spotlight. Smartwatches and phones both emit low levels of radio frequency energy. And while current safety guidelines say those levels are within acceptable limits, it's still smart to be mindful about how much time we're spending with these devices right up against our bodies. Most of us carry our phones like they're extra limbs—back pockets, sports bras tucked under pillows. And while phones emit non-ionizing radiation, which isn't the same kind that causes immediate harm like X-rays, there's still ongoing research about the long-term effects. Some studies suggest possible links to things like sleep disruption, fertility issues, and cognitive function, though nothing is conclusive yet. That said, a few small shifts can make a big difference. Try using speakerphone when you can, swap in a pair of wired earbuds, and maybe rethink sleeping with our phones under our pillows.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And these points that you raised, Christina, also tie back to posture, too. I've noticed that holding my phone up to my ear really messes with my neck. So, most of the time, I just switch to speakerphone to show my musculoskeletal system a little love and help me avoid that tech neck tension.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, and it's not just our necks. Eyestrain is a big one, too. Staring at screens for long periods, especially without breaks, can lead to headaches, dry eyes, and that heavy, tired feeling behind your eyes. I've definitely felt it after a long day of classes or back-to-back Zoom calls. One thing that's really helped me is the 20—20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. It's a super easy way to reset your eyes and give your body a little break from that constant forward/downward posture we fall into when we're on our phones or laptops.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, another big way technology use can affect us is sleep. Blue light from our screens can interfere with melatonin production and throw off our circadian rhythms, making it harder to fall and stay asleep. So, one of the things that I do is I try to limit my use a few hours before I'm going to go to bed at night.

DESHNA NAGAR: I wonder, does watching TV before bed also mess with your sleep?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I was actually just talking to my dad about this the other day because he had the same question. So, we looked it up, and what I found is that both phones and TVs emit blue light. But because we usually watch TV from a distance and hold our phones right up to our face, the impact can be a little different. The light from a TV is more dispersed, so it tends to be less disruptive to our sleep than the concentrated blue light from a phone. That said, it's not just about the light, it's also about the content. Watching a feel-good show on Netflix before bed might be a little bit more relaxing than scrolling through social media, which can flood you with negative news or social comparisons that leave you feeling anxious or stressed. So, both how and what we consume before bed really matter.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: And we should say there are tools that can help reduce the effects of blue light, like blue light-blocking glasses or screen filters. But like you mentioned, Lindsey, it's not just the light, it's also about the content we're consuming. So, while those tools can help, the best practice is to still limit phone use before bed whenever possible.

DESHNA NAGAR: Lindsey, you also mentioned you don't use your phone for an hour after you wake up, and I'm curious about why.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: So, there's growing research around how using your phone right after you wake up can impact your mental health, especially when it comes to dopamine. So, dopamine is often called the motivation or reward chemical, and plays a big role in focus, drive, and mood. And so, when we check our phone first thing, especially if we're jumping into emails and news alerts or social media, we're hitting our brain with a flood of dopamine before it's even fully awake. That spike can throw off our natural dopamine cycle and make it harder to feel motivated or focused later in the day.

DESHNA NAGAR: That's really interesting. I've also noticed that when I reach for my phone right away, it feels like I'm already running on someone else's schedule, so that makes a lot of sense. I also wonder what it would look like to create a morning routine that helps regulate that cycle instead, something more intentional like practicing gratitude before you plug in.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: So that all makes so much sense, and it connects to something else I've been thinking about. How anxious we can feel when we're away from our phones? There's actually research showing that heavy phone users can experience symptoms similar to separation anxiety when their device isn't nearby. It shows up in little ways, like constantly checking for updates, feeling uneasy during tech-free moments, or avoiding in-person experiences because we're used to being online. Recognizing that imbalance is the first step toward doing something about it. So, this feels like a good time to transition into talking about boundaries. And boundaries are so important when it comes to our digital wellness.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Christina, you mentioned the avoidance of in-person experiences, and it makes me think of an episode of the podcast Diary of a CEO that I was just listening to. And one of the guests was saying that he honestly—and wasn't being hyperbolic—thinks that the rise of these virtual spaces and how AI can take the place of human contact, and people are using it now for a virtual relationship experience. He's like, I honestly think this could be how the world ends. Basically, he was like, because frankly, younger generations are having less sex and later sex and not having as many kids. And his hypothesis was basically like that the more we let phones replace that in-person connection, it's actually killing off our birthrate and will be the end of our population. So interesting side note.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Wow, that is interesting.

DESHNA NAGAR: So, more phone use, less sex. That's going to be the selling point of our podcast.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I like how less sex trumps like the end of the human race there, Deshna. But back to boundaries. So, from conversations we've all had offline, I feel like the three of us are maybe unusually boundaried and have done a decent job of nurturing our digital wellness. So maybe we could talk about some of the things that we find helpful. Deshna, we'll start with you as our representative Gen Z-er. How do you, on behalf of your generation, how do you manage your relationship with technology?

DESHNA NAGAR: That's a good question. I find using the DND feature on my phone really helpful. I do that a lot.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: For us old people, DND is do not disturb.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yes.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I was just sitting here, What is DND?

DESHNA NAGAR: And I also try to keep my phone out of sight. But, yeah, that's not backed by evidence or anything, but it really helps me.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I actually think it probably is.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I think it is.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I'm sure we could find it if we looked for it. And, Christina, when we were talking about generational culture in our cultural wellness episode, we established that we're both part of a micro generation that is sometimes referred to as the Oregon Trail generation, because we grew up during that transition from analog to digital culture, so we remember both ways of life. I'm wondering if this has something to do with our relationship to technology.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, Lindsey, I'm thinking of the meme you sent us right before this podcast that at the top it says, to build character, I make my kids stare at this for five minutes before they can use Wi-Fi. And it's a screenshot of the old AOL login icon that would appear while your computer tried to connect to the internet.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Oh, my gosh, this brings back so many memories and frustrations. And, yes, actually, according to Google, a hallmark of this micro-generation is, quote, "many spent their formative years using AOL for communication and internet access." So that meme really resonates.

DESHNA NAGAR: I didn't realize I was talking to living relics of the dial-up era.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Deshna, when you saw that picture, did you even know what it was?

DESHNA NAGAR: No. But we digress. We were talking about setting boundaries. Christina, I wonder, how do you set digital boundaries?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: When it comes to digital wellness, there's so many small, but powerful actions that we can take to feel more grounded and more in control. It might look like setting screen time limits, creating tech-free zones in our home, or just being more intentional about when and why we reach for our phones. We could try managing our notifications so they're not constantly pulling at our attention or taking breaks to give our brains and our bodies a chance to reset.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, I almost feel guilty calling this any kind of cohesive strategy because it's really just how I survive as a functional human. But I am definitely the person who regularly loses track of her phone and can take days to respond to a text message. I've turned off pretty much all of my notifications because my ADHD just cannot handle constant task switching. So those are all things I've done just to, again, function. But if we wanted to turn Lindsay's brain into an actual strategy, it's all about customization, customizing your notifications, and creating intentional check-in times. For example, I do the opposite of, I think, typical workdays for most folks, which is that I don't check email first thing in the morning. I know that my brain is sharpest early in the day. That's when I have the most creative energy for things like writing or editing or other high-level tasks. And if I dive into email right away, I lose that window. So, setting boundaries around when and how I engage with tech helps me protect that prime brain time.

DESHNA NAGAR: That's not just you, Lindsey. Using technology in ways to maximize attention is important for everyone. To speak bluntly, the idea of multitasking is BS. Cal Newport, the author of Deep Work, compares constantly switching tasks throughout the day to being drunk at work. He points out that a lot of us, especially people in knowledge-based jobs, are spending most of our brainpower replying to emails, DMs, or slack messages instead of getting into the deep, meaningful parts of our work. And when we're bouncing from one thing to the next without finishing anything, our attention gets fragmented, and that drains both our energy and our productivity.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, and the research backs this up. A team at Stanford found that people who regularly try to multitask actually perform worse. They're more distracted, they struggle to recall information, and they're slower at switching between tasks than people who just focus on one thing at a time. Other researchers found similar things. That's because we're not actually multitasking, we're just switching rapidly between tasks, sometimes in as little as a tenth of a second. But every time we do that, our brain has to redirect energy, and that bandwidth shift is what slows us down and hurts the quality of our work.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: This is so validating.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, that explains a lot.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And we should also address the fact that you may get some pushback or negative feedback from folks in your personal or professional circle if and when you do implement boundaries around technology. For me, personally, I frame it as, this is how I do my best work. So, it's not about being unavailable or difficult or being a diva, it's about protecting the conditions that help me focus, be present, and also stay well. And if you're someone who struggles with how to say things like this out loud, we can give you a few simple scripts that you could try. So, let's say it's a personal thing, like you are not responding to texts or DMs right away. I'm so guilty of this. You might say, hey, just a heads up, I don't check my messages constantly throughout the day, but I'll get back to you when I can. Or in a work context, you could try something like, I check email at two set times during the day so I can stay focused on project work. If something is urgent, feel free to flag it, and I'll do my best to respond.

DESHNA NAGAR: Something I really appreciate about that is how setting and communicating your own boundaries can actually normalize it for other people. As someone who's earlier in her career, I might not always feel super comfortable being assertive about my tech boundaries. But if I saw colleagues, especially folks in leadership positions, modeling that kind of behavior, it would make it feel a lot more OK for me to do the same thing.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: We're talking about phones and technology as a whole, but I feel like we can't do an episode on digital wellness and not talk about social media. I'm curious, what are both of your relationships to social media, which apps do you use?

DESHNA NAGAR: So, I was really impulsive recently, and I deleted Instagram. So now I'm only using LinkedIn.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: And I also use LinkedIn. And when we were talking about this offline, I wasn't even thinking of LinkedIn as a social media app. I used it for work and for career-related posts, and so it didn't even come across to me as a social media app. And like Deshna, I also have removed Facebook and those apps from my phone. So, if I want to go on to Facebook, I have to go in through the browser.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, I'm pretty similar to both of you in that I have Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook, which I pretty much only use for certain groups I'm in or for Marketplace, but I'm actually just coming off of social media fast. So, the past few years, I've given up social media for Lent, which is a 40-day period some Christian denominations observe around Easter. It's like when people abstain from certain foods or other pleasures or things like that. And every time I do this, it follows the same pattern. It's a challenge for

about a day or two, and then as soon as I get in the habit of not using social media, it feels really good. And I always say I'm going to keep it up. But then after Lent, I seem to inevitably slip back into it.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Well, you have to use social media for work.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, and I know I'm not the only one. That's a good point, but I've still found ways to set boundaries around it. There were times during my Lenten fast when I posted something or did something work-related. But my promise to myself was like, OK, I'm just going to do this one thing, but I'm not going to look at any other content or start scrolling.

DESHNA NAGAR: I think that's a good model, because we've all heard about social media detoxes as a way to boost our well-being. But recent research suggests that it's not that straightforward. A study found that while taking a break from social media can reduce negative emotions, it might also decrease positive feelings like joy and connection. This highlights that our interactions online fulfill certain emotional needs. So instead of a full detox, it might be more beneficial to be mindful of how and why we use social media.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: That's interesting, Deshna. So maybe it's less about quitting and more about modulating.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, so the goal isn't to cut out tech completely, it's to use it in ways that protects your well-being and helps you live with more clarity, energy, and purpose.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I'm thinking about how it was called social media because it was originally about making connections. It can be easy to forget that in the context of how polarized and toxic certain spheres have become. And so, in terms of wellness, we can really think of it like a tool. And this might be a poor or off-color example, but just like a hammer can be used either as a tool to build something beautiful or as a weapon to bludgeon someone over the head, social media can be used for either good or harm.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Well, that's an important point. We need to remember that we have agency over what it does to us and for us.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Definitely. And I've become very intentional about checking in with myself about how different accounts make me feel. Even ones that might not be objectively toxic, if I notice that I'm suddenly feeling insecure or stressed after engaging with something, I'm pretty quick to unfollow or mute that account.

DESHNA NAGAR: Maybe as a wellness strategy, we could suggest doing periodic reviews of the accounts you follow and removing any that don't nurture your wellness for whatever reason. As you said, Lindsey, it doesn't have to mean that the account is in any way bad or toxic. It just means that something about it isn't landing right for you.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, absolutely. Another boundary or wellness strategy can be scheduling offline time. Not only can this be important for our digital wellness, but it can also help nurture some of the degrees we've talked about in previous episodes, like our social, creative, and environmental wellness. Unplugging from our devices can allow us to prioritize offline activities that we enjoy, like reading, exercising, cooking, or spending time with family and friends. It can be helpful to schedule these activities into our calendar, so it becomes something that we plan for and look forward to. A good goal is to incorporate at least one offline activity each day.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I also really like the idea of tech-free zones and houses. I've seen people have a lot of fun with this, having some clever sign by the door, or wherever the zone is, and then having a basket for people to put their phones.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I love this suggestion. My daughter, when we get ready to watch a movie, she'll go around and say, OK, give me your phone. And she'll take the phones and put them in a drawer. And it's so funny. My partner sometimes will be like, where'd my phone go?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Again, I've said this in previous episodes, your daughter just sounds like the coolest. I mean, Deshna is the coolest, but your daughters right up there too.

DESHNA NAGAR: No, I think your daughter definitely takes the lead. I'm also thinking about how, in past episodes, we've talked about how helpful it is to know your why—why you're making a certain choice or change. And that definitely applies to digital wellness as well. We've already touched on how it supports our physical and emotional health. But if you're someone who's motivated by activism, or even a little healthy rebellion, tech boundaries can tap into that too. We live in an attention economy, where companies are constantly competing for our time, our focus, and our energy. So, setting boundaries around your tech use isn't just about self-care, it can also be a form of resistance.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I love that, Deshna.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Me, too.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And Deshna talked about protecting time, so I want one more note on protection. And hopefully this goes without saying, but please don't text and drive. I know lot of us, maybe most of us, have probably done it at some point, but that doesn't make it OK. It is incredibly dangerous, and the consequences can be life-altering, or even life-ending. No message is worth the risk. So, if there's one boundary we can all hold firm to, let it be this one—stay off the phone while you're behind the wheel.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: That's a very important message, Lindsey. Thanks for bringing that up. So, as we think about technology as a tool, it might be helpful to not just talk about how to block out negative influences, but to consider some of the more positive uses that can proactively nurture our wellness. So, I'm curious, if anything comes up for the two of you, how do you use technology to actively promote your wellness?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: One example that's been a total game changer for me is an app called Sleep Cycle. The basic idea is this—instead of setting a strict wake up time like you would with a traditional alarm, you set a window. Mine is 30 minutes. And then you set a time that you want to be woken up by. The app then uses your phone's microphone to track your sleep and figures out when you're in the lightest stage. So, if I say, I want to be up by 6:00 AM, it might wake me up at 5:33. And, yeah, I might technically be getting a little less sleep, but I feel way more energized because I'm not being yanked out of a deep sleep.

DESHNA NAGAR: That's such a good example of how we can use tech to support our wellness.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And there may be other smart alarm apps out there that do the same thing. This is just the one I'm familiar with. So, as we always say, not an endorsement, just our personal experiences.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: And coming back to something that we've brought up several times, find what works well for you. I'm someone who leaves my phone outside the bedroom. So, while I wouldn't really use this app or find it useful, it sounds like it really works well for you.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, as we're always talking about, that's just what works for me. I'm curious if there are apps you Christina or you Deshna would use or do use if you wouldn't use Sleep Cycle.

DESHNA NAGAR: This is meta, meaning the concept of meta, not the company, but there are apps to help you limit your use of screen time. I could definitely see myself using one of those. What about you, Christina?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, there's actually one I use. Have you ever heard of the Oppo app?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I don't think so.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: It's basically like a digital accountability buddy. The whole idea is to help cut down on screen time and stay focused by blocking distracting apps and websites, especially when it's time for us to concentrate. So, these focus sessions can be set up, where certain apps like social media or games are off limits for a set amount of time. And it's perfect if you're trying to work, study, sleep, or just be more present without that

constant pull of your phone. What's cool is that it also tracks your screen habits and gives you insights, so we can actually see where our time's going. Plus, it's customizable, so we can create routines around work hours or sleep. So, our phone works with us and not against us.

DESHNA NAGAR: I have to check out that app.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: And you don't even actually need an app. You can just use your device settings to set screen time limits.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And in terms of other more basic uses of technology, like just using our device settings, I'm thinking about just how much easier it's gotten to stay in touch with people, and how that's actually a benefit of technology that we can overlook because it's become so built into our daily lives. Like, Deshna, in our social wellness episode, you talked about video conferencing with your mom. And that has me thinking about how great technology can be as a tool to just help us stay connected.

DESHNA NAGAR: Absolutely. I love video-calling my mom.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I also like to use the video-calling as well. My mom lives an hour and a half away from me, so it does help bring her into our environment, even though it's virtually. And that helps my mom and my daughter to stay connected as well.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And there are lots of other ways that technology can help us nurture our wellness. For example, all phones come with an alarm clock. So, when we were talking about tech neck and posture earlier, one way to mitigate this is to take movement breaks. So, one thing I've adopted that could be a wellness strategy is to set an alarm to prompt me to move. And I would offer that up as a strategy for others to do the same.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, I've also heard of people using alarms for things like affirmations or mindset check-ins. You can even assign different alarm tones to different reminders, so your brain starts to associate each sound with a specific intention or habit. It's a simple way to rewire your brain and to build more awareness into your day.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I've heard of people setting a mid-day alarm just to take to pause, take three breaths, or drink a glass of water. Another thing that I like to do instead of making work meetings an hour, making them 45 minutes or 50 minutes, and then using that 10 to 15 minutes for a wellness walk or another wellness activity.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's a great tip, Christina. Another really simple way that we can use our phone to support our wellness is by turning it into a tool for sound that helps us focus or wind down, whether that's meditations, calming music, or ambient noise. I've shared in past episodes that I use different sound spectrums, like green and pink noise for

sleep, or brown noise when I'm working. And I just stream all of it from my phone. So that can be another easy, low effort way to create a more supportive environment and use technology in a way that nurtures our wellness.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: And one degree of wellness we haven't really touched on yet in the context of digital wellness is career. That's actually the focus of our next episode, but I think it's worth mentioning here too. Because how we manage our digital presence can absolutely impact our career wellness. One really practical habit to build in regularly is reviewing our professional profiles, like our LinkedIn, our digital portfolios, or even what comes up on Google when we search ourselves. Keeping those profiles up to date can help support our growth and also help save us from the last-minute scramble when a new opportunity pops up. A couple quick tips. Set a reminder to update your profile every few months, just like you might with a dental checkup. Highlight any new accomplishments, certifications, or projects. Remember, celebrate those wins. And don't forget to check your privacy settings and passwords. Make sure what's visible is what you want everyone to see. Recently, I found out on Venmo that your friends can see your transactions. And I was like, what Why would my—

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I've always found super weird, by the way.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, I didn't know that.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, so, I've changed my setting in this past week because I was like, wait, what?

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I will never—if someone can write in and explain to us why that's even a thing, I don't know. But I don't know why anybody finds benefit from people seeing what they've paid for.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, but to get back to career, little habits like this can really take the stress out of our digital career maintenance.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And circling back to how we use social media. We mentioned LinkedIn a minute ago, is that's become the app that I use the most because for now, it feels like it's avoided some of the toxicity we see on other platforms. I feel like as soon as I say that it's got to go down the drain. But it's been a safe space for me to stay connected with people, while also learning and growing professionally.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, that's true.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, and I totally relate to that. Like I said earlier, I wasn't even thinking of LinkedIn as social media because there is no stress afterwards. And that's what social media has come to be for me, unfortunately. So, as we're exploring the connection between digital wellness and career wellness, I think this is a great moment to shift into

some community level strategies that support both. One that really stands out is how we use web conferencing, not just for Team meetings, but as a way to stay socially and emotionally connected. So, like we talked about a moment ago, just to reiterate, platforms like Zoom or Teams can be a lifeline, especially for folks working remotely or living far from friends and family. These tools help us to collaborate, but they also help us build and sustain community, which is such a core part of wellness. And since video calls can sometimes feel a little flat, it helps to be more intentional about how we engage. We miss a lot of natural body language in virtual spaces, so finding creative ways to express connection really does matter. Even small things like using emojis—and Deshna's teaching us the cool ones to use—dropping a quick comment in the chat, or giving a big, exaggerated head nod can help make those interactions feel more human.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, I love that you're framing it beyond work. I have friends all over the country and will schedule virtual coffee dates or check-ins. It's just such a simple way to maintain connection, even across a distance, that can just feel more intimate than a phone call. I even do sometimes virtual movie dates with friends where we'll hit play at the same time and then share in a viewing experience together.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, I've done that too. And I've already shared how video calls are a big part of how I stay close to my family. One thing I think is really important to acknowledge when we talk about digital wellness is that for some people, especially folks in marginalized communities, digital spaces can be incredibly empowering. For example, a lot of LGBTQ individuals have found connection, identity, and support online that they might not have access to in their immediate environment.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yes, absolutely. And I'd add that digital spaces can also be incredibly empowering for people with disabilities or for neurodivergent folks. Because technology can offer flexibility, accessibility tools, and communication options that just aren't available in every in-person space. And we've talked about in previous episodes; they can also help mitigate things like sensory overload by letting you stay in a controlled environment.

DESHNA NAGAR: Exactly. And in our episode on cultural wellness, we talked about how technology can create opportunities to connect with creators whose experiences might be different from our own. And that kind of exposure can really support our growth and overall wellness.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yes, digital spaces can give people access to support, identity, and expressions that they may not find offline. And when those spaces are designed with care and intention, they can become really powerful tools for inclusion. But that's also why we have to be mindful of how these same spaces can become harmful when they're under moderated or unsafe.

DESHNA NAGAR: And while digital spaces can be absolutely empowering, we also have to acknowledge the harm that can happen there, especially when it comes to cyberbullying. It's a huge issue, particularly for young people and marginalized groups. And it can take a real toll on mental health and digital safety. From a community perspective, one way we can support digital wellness is by creating and enforcing community guidelines, whether that's in schools, online forums, or even group chats. It's about setting clear expectations for respectful behavior and making sure there are systems in place to report and address harm. We can also model what it looks like to engage with empathy online, calling in rather than calling out when possible. In supporting people who are targeted, digital wellness isn't just about individual choices. It's also about the kind of digital culture we create together.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Love that. And that feels like a great note to end on. That's it for this episode of *12 Degrees*. To learn more, you can visit wellness.psu.edu. Also, be sure to and follow this podcast so you don't miss any of the upcoming conversations that will help you adopt healthy habits. I'm Lindsay Whissel Fenton.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm Christina Lightner.

DESHNA NAGAR: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Until next time, we wish you good progress on your wellness journey. *12 Degrees* is produced by in collaboration with the Penn State Ross and Carol Nese College of Nursing. This podcast is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or mental health condition. Please consult your physician or other qualified healthcare provider immediately if you are experiencing any suicidal thoughts. If you're in crisis, help is available for free 24/7 in the US by calling or texting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. More information is available at 988lifeline.org.

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