



What are the dangers of video game addiction?

Video games are becoming increasingly complex, detailed, and compelling to a growing international audience of players. With better graphics, more realistic characters, and greater strategic challenges, it's not surprising that some teens would rather play the latest video game than hang out with friends, play sports, or even watch television.

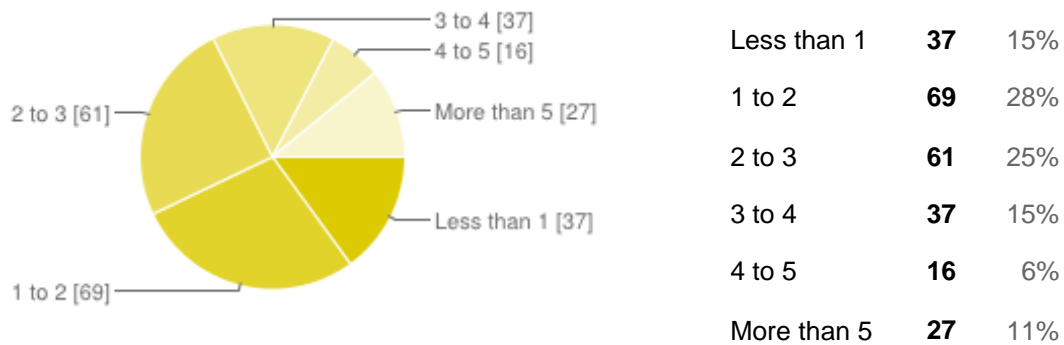
Of course, all gamers are not addicts – many teens can play video games for just a few hours a week, successfully balancing school activities, grades, friends, and family obligations. But for some, gaming has become an uncontrollable compulsion.

Symptoms of video game addiction in teens

Although it hasn't been given an "official" diagnosis, addiction-like behaviours with computer, video, and Internet gaming have noticeably increased among both teenagers and adults. Like any addictive behaviour, there are signs to look for if you suspect your teen might have a gaming addiction. Your teen need only exhibit two or three of these symptoms for his behaviour to be considered "addictive."

- **Preoccupation**
The teen could seem distracted, irritable, or disinterested and may talk about the game almost constantly.
- **Downplaying Computer Use**
It is common to downplay the amount of time spent on the computer.
- **Lack of Control**
The person may go online with the intent of playing for 15 or 20 minutes, but will keep extending the session until several hours have passed.
- **Loss of Time**
It is not unusual for someone with a gaming addiction to play through the night and only realise how much time has passed when the sun begins to rise.
- **Negative Impact on Other Areas of Life**
Because the person spends so much time on the computer or video game console, other areas of life are neglected. They may grow distant from friends and family when they had previously been close. Homework may go unfinished, causing grades to slip. In more extreme cases, the teen may even neglect personal hygiene, choosing to play video games rather than taking a shower.
- **Hiding from Negative or Uncomfortable Feelings or Situations**
Some people become addicted to gaming because they use it to self-medicate. When confronted with situations or feelings that are uncomfortable (feeling sad, arguing with a friend, or getting a bad grade), the person may 'hide' in the game as a method of avoidance.
- **Defensiveness**
Denial is often an indication that something is wrong, especially if the person seems unconcerned that friends and family feel neglected or left out of their life.
- **Misuse of Money**
Someone who is addicted to video, computer, or Internet gaming will spend a disproportionate amount of money on computer-related items.

On average, how many hours each day do you spend watching TV or in front of a computer?



The chart illustrates that many of our pupils spend their recreation time in front of a computer. Despite pupils spending their morning and afternoon in school, 32% of pupils still manage to spend over 3 hours in front of a screen and, worryingly, 11% spend over 5 hours, which suggests that this is the **only** thing they do after arriving home from school. What about exercise and homework?

What are the physical consequences?

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome- the area of the wrist that houses the main nerve and tendons becomes swollen or irritated.

Migraines- someone who plays video games for extended periods of time is more prone to migraines because of the intense concentration required and the strain put on the eyes.

Sleep Disturbances- some people can't get a good night's sleep simply because they think obsessively about the game they're playing.

Backaches- most gamers stay seated in the same position for hours on end and the lack of movement causes stiffness and soreness, but could deteriorate into chronic back problems.

Eating Irregularities- rather than eating healthy, balanced meals, they eat food that is quick and usually unhealthy or don't even eat at all so they can spend more time on a computer.

Poor Personal Hygiene- an addicted gamer is not going to take the time to properly care for himself as it is less of a priority.

These physical consequences will occur in varying degrees from one gamer to another. Though the severity of physical consequences is often tied to the severity of the addiction, this is not always the case. A gamer that is already in poor physical condition will be more susceptible to these effects early on.

What are the social consequences?

Game addicts have to choose whether to interact with the real world or continue living in their virtual one. Sadly, the real world rarely wins.

Some of the physical consequences of video game addiction can lead to social consequences as well. For instance, an addicted gamer who loses sleep because he's playing so much simply doesn't have the energy to invest in relationships. Lack of sleep may also make them irritable and difficult to be around.

The lack of social interaction that results from obsessive gaming can have long-term social consequences. An addicted teenager won't develop effective social skills, which will hinder their ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships in college and beyond. Suddenly, they are 21 with the social skills of a 15-year-old and no ability to make friends, develop relationships, or just "hang out" and enjoy people's company. The social awkwardness created by the isolationism of gaming addiction, unfortunately, feeds the addiction. The gaming addict will more than likely retreat back to their online world where relationships are easier and already waiting for them.

Top tips for parents/guardians:

- **Take the screens out of your child's bedroom.** Don't let your children have a computer or television in their bedroom.
- **Make them earn game time.** This teaches youngsters how to prioritise real-life activities over the game. Perhaps they need to do certain chores before they can play or finish their homework. Almost any activity will do as long as it shows your child that time with the game comes at the bottom of their to-do list.
- **Try to help foster your child's social life outside of the game.** Video games are sometimes an escape for children who find it difficult to relate to those around them.
- **Don't let the game become their primary reward system.** Give them goals outside of the game that they need to achieve. Often, addictive games are so enticing because they reward players for meeting certain goals. However, these goals are always replaced with harder, more time-consuming goals, so the player is never quite "done" with the game. If children feel that they have more important goals to achieve than those laid out in the game, they will be less inclined to want to play all day.

Summary

None of the information on this Web site is meant to alarm or scare people. It is, however, intended to help raise awareness of the seriousness of gaming addiction. The dangers and consequences are real. If you or a young person and show signs of gaming addiction, it's important to get help as soon as possible.

References:

Source: VideoGameAddiction.net.

Source: NetAddictionRecovery.blogspot.com