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Avoid 'Gamer Rage'

Don't let violent video games turn you into a Hulk

by John Casey

Really, it's not just you. A good dose of video game death and mayhem has been shown in numerous studies to spark the urge in many men to run amok in real life. In fact, according to one large-scale study of men and violent video games, there is a direct relationship between amount of time spent playing violent video games and increased risk of being what scientists call "highly aggressive."



That means many happy hours spent sowing destruction on *Grand Theft Auto* or *Resident Evil 5*, over time, makes you more likely to show up at work on Monday morning with a black eye and bandaged knuckles.

"There does seem to be a consensus forming in the psychological community that violent video games have an association with aggression," says Brian Primack, MD, an assistant professor of medicine and pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh, who has done extensive research on ways video games influence real-world behavior.

"It does increase the risk of aggressive behavior, largely by reinforcing their vigilance for aggressive encounters, aggressive thoughts and feelings," says Douglas Gentile, PhD, who directs the Media Research Lab at Iowa State University. Violent games "lower the bar for what provocation is needed for an aggressive response."

Here's how to avoid becoming a post-game "Hulk."

Mix Some *Tetris* With Your *Assassin's Creed*

It turns out that video games are great teachers. In a landmark 2009 study, Gentile and colleagues found that males who habitually played violent video games had a better than 70 percent increased risk of being highly aggressive when compared to males who played both violent and non-violent games, and a whopping 260 percent compared to players of only non-violent games.

But games can foster tolerance and forbearance just as well as they can amplify your worst impulses. Gentile suggests that you can use this to your advantage by adding non-violent games, like *Tetris*, into the mix.

"There hasn't been a lot of research on pro-social aspects of video games," says Primack. "But it makes sense that if violent games appear to be associated with aggression, then non-violent games would tend to counteract the aggression."



Step Away From the Controller

Even if you don't go out and clobber your neighbor, video games may well be clobbering your health. According to a study done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, regular video game playing of any type appears to be associated with increased risk of depression, reliance on the Internet for social support and higher levels of body fat.

"Health-risk factors — specifically, a higher BMI and a greater number of poor mental-health days — differentiated adult video-game players from non-players," James Weaver, PhD, of the CDC's National Center for Health Marketing, wrote in that study, which was published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. "Video-game players also reported lower extroversion, consistent with research on adolescents that linked video-game playing to a sedentary life style and overweight status, and to mental-health concerns."

Put the controller down, Weaver might as well have said, and get your fat ass outside for some exercise.



Moderation Keeps Hulk at Bay

"If you're a regular, law-abiding man, it's not likely that playing violent video games is going to land you in jail," says Primack. "It's important to keep moderation in mind."

How much is too much? That all depends.

"As a general rule I'd say that you are gaming too much once it starts to interfere with your relationships and your employment or schooling, but I'm not sure individuals are always the best judge of that," says Laura Walker, assistant professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University and who also has researched video games' influence. You know you're in trouble, she adds, when you start "avoiding social interactions to play."

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