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At a Crossroads: Video Game Addiction

by [Paula Bach](#) and [Chris Jordan](#)

"I have played video games before. You know, for fun, or to relieve some stress. But I can stop any time." Sound familiar? For most of us, video gaming is fun and good for relieving stress. But recently, BBC News [\[1\]](#) reported on a man who played a computer game for fifty hours straight, with few breaks, and then collapsed and died due to heart failure and exhaustion.

If you thought video game addiction was a joke, you need a wake-up call. Video game addiction is a form of non-substance abuse like gambling. Fisher [\[2\]](#), in 1994, reported on a study of addiction to arcade machines. Adolescents surveyed in the study were from a small community that relied on tourism, and arcade machines available for tourists were easily accessible to these teenagers. The researchers used pathological measures that were adapted from those used to identify gambling addiction in adults. The results of the study identified some adolescents that were "pathological players" and found that not only did they play a lot more, but also that they were spending their lunch money, borrowing, stealing, and selling their possessions to play.

Can gaming be a real addiction? The brain's reward system is partially responsible for a drug's potent addictive properties, and according to Koeppe and colleagues [\[3\]](#), video game players seem to experience a dopamine-induced euphoria equivalent to one hit of methamphetamine.

So far we have painted a pretty grim picture about video games and their effects on people. Video games, however, are not drugs. For most of us they provide many hours of entertainment. Still, video game addiction is real; and just like a drug addiction it

can have a negative impact on the lives of game addicts and the people around them.

What about those of us who work with computers for hours at a time? For many of us, our jobs, studies, and lives require us to be in front of a computer for at least six or more hours every day. Could our constant computer usage mean that we are susceptible to the same addictive effects? No research exists to answer this question.

Yet, we probably all know people who play video games for many hours. You know, the ones that rarely show up to class and only talk about playing "The Sims." The question is, are they addicted or not? We don't know. But if someone you know has been faltering at school or work because of playing games, chances are they have a problem.

So what can you do if you suspect a friend or family member may be addicted? This is a difficult question to answer. While some form of counseling may be in order, getting the person to agree to get help can be tough. Many universities have counseling services freely available to their students; this would be a good place to start. The worst thing you can do is nothing.

References

1

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Biography

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