

# Older adults watch more TV than younger people, enjoy it less

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We usually scold our children and teenagers for watching too much TV. It turns out that their grandmas and grandpas spend even more of their time watching TV, and it is not good for them either, according to researchers at the Stein Institute for Research on Aging and Rady School of Management at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine.

In a study published online in advance of publication in the August issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), UCSD researchers examined television use in a large, nationally representative sample that was collected by the Center for Health and Well Being at Princeton University. Using an innovative, diary-like assessment strategy called the Day Reconstruction Method, study participants were asked to measure how they spent their time and describe their experience of everyday activities.

"We found that older people spent a great deal more time watching TV than younger people did, yet they enjoyed the experience less," said first author Colin A. Depp, PhD, assistant professor of psychiatry with UCSD's Stein Institute for Research on Aging. "What the study underscored is that alternatives to television as entertainment are needed, especially in older adults."

The study looked at 3,092 Americans, aged 15 to 98, in survey data collected in 2006. Adults over 65 reported spending three times more of their waking hours watching TV than did younger adults. Older adults

did not seem to experience the same "stress buffering" effects that younger adults did from watching TV, and TV use among older adults - unlike time spent on other leisure activities, such as socializing or [physical exercise](#) - was related to lower life satisfaction.

Data from other studies indicate that the average American household spends 4.5 hours watching TV per day and, in those over age 65, about 25% percent of their time is spent watching TV. Recent work suggests that [sedentary activity](#), such as TV watching, is associated with negative changes in many aspects of health including cardiovascular, bone health and cellular function. Television use in particular has been linked with greater risk for obesity and Type2 diabetes, lower [life satisfaction](#), less frequent engagement in social and physical interaction, and increased risk for dementia.

The authors were surprised to find that older adults experienced TV watching as less enjoyable than younger people. "It is reasonable to expect that older adults may enjoy TV more than younger ones do, because they have fewer demands on their time. Prior studies also suggest they may use TV to regulate negative emotions," said co-author Dilip V. Jeste, MD, Distinguished Professor of psychiatry and neurosciences at UCSD School of Medicine, Estelle and Edgar Levi Chair in Aging, and director of the Stein Institute for Research on Aging. "Yet, our study indicates that [older adults](#) report lower levels of positive emotion while [watching TV](#) when compared to other activities - which is not the case in younger adults."

The researchers concluded that increasing public awareness of alternatives to TV watching and reducing barriers to alternative activities that are more socially and physically engaging could reduce TV use in older people and diminish the potential for associated negative health effects.

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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