

When video games get problematic so do smoking, drug use and aggression

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A new study on gaming and health in adolescents, conducted by researchers at Yale School of Medicine, found some significant gender differences linked to gaming as well as important health risks associated with problematic gaming. Published today in the journal *Pediatrics*, the study is among the first and largest to examine possible health links to gaming and problematic gaming in a community sample of adolescents.

Rani Desai, associate professor of psychiatry and epidemiology and public health at Yale, and colleagues anonymously surveyed 4,028 [adolescents](#) about their gaming, problems associated with gaming and other [health behaviors](#). They found that 51.2% of the teens played video games (76.3% of boys and 29.2% of girls). The study not only revealed that, overall, there were no negative health consequences of gaming in boys, but that gaming was linked to lower odds of smoking regularly. Among girls, however, gaming was associated with getting into serious fights and carrying a weapon to school.

Although most adolescents appear to be gaming without any ill effects, in a small proportion the behavior becomes problematic, notes Desai. Of those surveyed, 4.9% reported that they had trouble cutting back on their gaming, felt an irresistible urge to play, or experienced tension that could only be relieved by playing. Boys were more likely to report problems (5.8%) than girls (3.0%). In this group, problematic gaming was linked to regular cigarette smoking, drug use, depression and serious fights in both boys and girls.

"The results suggest that in general recreational gaming is relatively harmless, particularly in boys. This is in contrast to many previously publicized reports suggesting that gaming leads to [aggression](#)" said Desai. "However, the [gender differences](#) observed between gamers and non-gamers suggest that girls may be gaming for different reasons than boys."

Desai said the prevalence of problematic gaming is low, but not insignificant. She added that more research is needed to define safe levels of gaming, refine the definition of problematic gaming, and evaluate effective prevention and intervention strategies.

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Provided by Yale University

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