

Video gaming addiction can control your thoughts, recommendation for further study

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A psychology researcher from Canberra has collected some of the first scientific evidence that video gaming can be addictive in a way similar to gambling and alcohol.

"People who spend an excessive amount of time [playing video games](#) are powerless to stop themselves from thinking about gaming," says Olivia Metcalf, who did the research for her PhD at the Australian National University. "This is a pattern typical of addiction," she says.

"Many people have claimed that video games can be addictive. But this is some of the first hard evidence."

Olivia presented about 20 video gaming "addicts" with different words and asked them to respond to the colour of the word, not the meaning. They were significantly slower to name the colour of gaming-related words compared to words which had nothing to do with gaming. Non-addicted gamers showed no difference in [response times](#).

"We found that the attention system of an excessive gamer gives top priority to gaming information. Even if they don't want to think about gaming, they are unable to stop themselves. This likely makes stopping or cutting back on gaming even more difficult," Olivia says.

"This phenomenon, known as attentional bias, is found across heroin, [nicotine](#), alcohol and [gambling addictions](#), and is thought to be a significant factor in the development of an addiction."

While most people who play video games do so without suffering [negative consequences](#), a minority of gamers experience significant adverse changes to their diet, sleep, relationships, work and school commitments as a result of their inability to stop gaming. There has been significant debate as to whether or not excessive gaming can be considered an addiction.

Research like hers begins to build the evidence base used to determine whether the behaviour can be classified as an addiction, Olivia says, and helps [psychologists](#) to develop effective treatments for gamers who are unable to stop.

A forthcoming edition of the standard reference book which defines mental health disorders—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)* published by the American Psychological Association—recommends that internet-use addictive disorder, including excessive gaming, be regarded as an area for further study.

Olivia Metcalf is one of 12 early career scientists unveiling their research to the public for the first time thanks to Fresh Science, a national program sponsored by the Australian Government. She is now based in Melbourne.

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