

Using media as a stress reducer can lead to feelings of guilt and failure

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It seems common practice. After a long day at work, sometimes you just want to turn on the TV or play a video game to relax, decompress. This is supposed to make you feel better. But, a recent study published in the *Journal of Communication*, by researchers at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany, and VU University Amsterdam, found that people who had high stress levels after work and engaged in television viewing or video game play didn't feel relaxed or recovered, but had high levels of guilt and feelings of failure.

Leonard Reinecke (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) and Tilo Hartmann and Allison Eden, (VU University Amsterdam) surveyed 471 participants to think about the preceding day and report how they had felt after work and what media they had used. The researchers found that people who were particularly fatigued after work or school showed a higher tendency to feel that their media use was a form of procrastination. They felt that they succumbed to their desire of using media instead of taking care of more important tasks. As a result, they had a higher risk of feeling guilty about their media use. These feelings of guilt diminished the positive effects of media use and reduced recovery and vitality after media use.

The results also suggest a paradoxical pattern between depletion and media-induced recovery: Those depleted individuals who could have benefitted the most from recovery through media use, instead experienced lower levels of recovery because they took their media use as a sign of their own self-control failure.

Prior research has shown that the use of entertaining media produces a "recovery experience", that helps us to psychologically detach from work stress and relax, but also provides mastery experience (e.g., when you beat a computer game or watch a thought-provoking movie) and a feeling of control during leisure time. As a result, people feel energized and more vital after media use and even show stronger cognitive performance thanks to media-induced recovery.

"We are beginning to better understand that media use can have beneficial effects for people's well-being, through media-induced recovery. Our present study is an important step towards a deeper understanding of this. It demonstrates that in the real life, the relationship between media use and well-being is complicated and that the use of media may conflict with other, less pleasurable but more important duties and goals in everyday life," said Reinecke. "We are starting to look at [media](#) use as a cause of depletion. In times of smartphones and mobile Internet, the ubiquitous availability of content and communication often seems to be a burden and a stressor rather than a recovery resource."

More information: *Journal of Communication* [DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12107](#)

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