

Do video games drive obesity?

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A chubby teen lolling on the sofa for hours on end, the game controller in one hand, a bag of crisps at his side and a bottle of coke on the coffee table. This is the mental picture many people have of the typical gamer. Along with this goes the widespread notion that frequent gaming contributes to obesity. Is this justified?

"The study contradicts this stereotype for children and teenagers. In adults, there is a slight positive correlation between playing video games and body mass," explains Professor Markus Appel, a communication psychologist at the University of Würzburg. Researchers from the University of Würzburg (Markus Appel, Caroline Marker) and from the Johannes Kepler University Linz and the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories in Bamberg (Professor Timo Gnamb) conducted a [meta analysis](#) comprising a total of 20 relevant studies with more than 38,000 participants. However, the analysis revealed only a small correlation between [video game](#) playing and excess weight or body mass. Only one percent of a person's overweight can thus be attributed to time spent playing computer games.

No link in children and teenagers

The link was only established for adults but not for children and teenagers. "It may be that people who are overweight are more likely to continue their hobby of playing video games during the transition to adulthood whereas new leisure time activities become more important for others," Appel suggests.

In the past, the link between gaming and overweight has already been studied by several researchers. "Overweight and obesity are usually associated with sedentary media consumption such as watching television or playing non-[active video games](#)," the team of researchers writes in its current study published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*. The new meta analysis was launched because the individual studies yielded different results.

Less time exercising

How can the correlation be explained? "We identified a significant

indirect effect which shows that people who spend more time playing video games also spend less time exercising and therefore weigh more or have more [body mass](#)," the team from Würzburg and Linz writes. Other factors such as eating [junk food](#) while gaming or lack of sleep were not verified because there were not enough relevant studies available.

The scientists considered only sedentary video games in their current analysis—i.e. games that are played in a sitting position. Active video games such as Wii Sports or Pokémon Go, which require the players to move, were not taken into consideration.

More information: Exploring the myth of the chubby gamer: A meta-analysis on sedentary video gaming and body mass. Caroline Marker, Timo Gnamb, Markus Appel. *Social Science and Medicine*, 2019

Provided by University of Würzburg

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