

What TV binge-watching does to your brain

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Binge-watching episodes of your favorite shows does no favors for your brain, an expert warns.

"It's important to recognize that the brain is not an isolated organ—it responds to its environment," said Dr. Randall Wright, a neurologist at Houston Methodist in Texas. "When we binge-watch, we create an unhealthy environment for the brain because we're sitting for long periods of time, isolating ourselves from [social activities](#) and eating large amounts of unhealthy food."

Wright likens the [instant gratification](#) of watching episode after episode of a show to wanting to continue gambling even after you win.

If you indulge often, this cycle and the side effects of binge-watching can lead to harmful brain and body changes, he said in a hospital news release. In other words, it's a problem when watching a third, fourth or fifth episode of your favorite show replaces healthy activities, he said.

But here's the good news: You don't have to stop cold-turkey. There are a number of ways to ward off negative effects of binge-watching:

- **First, be sure it doesn't prevent you from getting enough sleep.** "Before you start your show, determine what time you need to go to bed to get enough sleep. It might be helpful to set a bedtime alarm so that you don't lose track of time and to help you stick to that decision," Wright said.
- **Get your exercise.** "Recent research has shown that the brain can generate new cells and connections through a process known as neurogenesis, and exercise is key to that process," Wright said. "Taking a walk around your neighborhood before binge-watching and standing for five minutes during every episode can help keep your body and brain active."
- **Watch with friends.** "If you're watching TV for six hours, that's six hours of not interacting with others," Wright said. "The hours alone add up and can lead to depression and other mental health

issues. Balancing time alone with the television and time spent with loved ones is the key to avoiding social isolation."

- **If you have snacks, make healthy choices.** "Hummus and vegetables, edamame or fruits are great snacks if you crave something to eat while binge-watching. Try to stay away from binge-eating salty, fatty foods when you sit down to watch television," Wright suggested.

"If you incorporate these tips into your binge-watching routine," he concluded, "You can create lasting healthy habits and still enjoy the occasional binge-watching session without hurting your [brain](#)."

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health outlines the [health risks of inactivity](#).

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