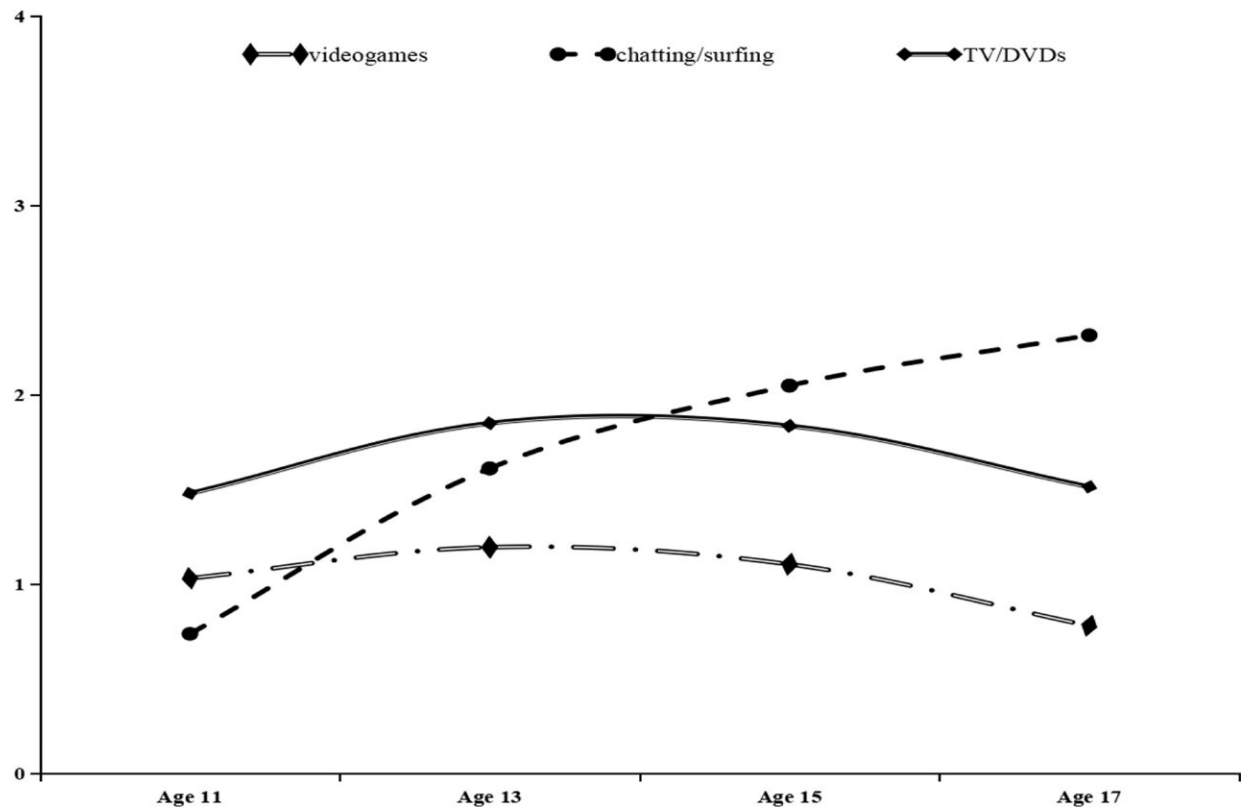


# Teens who up screen time raise mental health risks: Study

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Average model-based trajectories of screen time on videogames, chatting/surfing, and TV/DVDs. The values on the vertical axis represent the number of hours per day, with 4 = more than 3 h per day. Credit: *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2023). DOI: 10.1007/s10964-023-01782-x

Young people who spent progressively more time online or playing video

games were more likely to be depressed, anxious or to self-harm at 20, the study found.

Those who spent excessive amounts of time on multiple media screen activities in [early adolescence](#) were more prone to aggressive behavior and tobacco and cannabis use when older, researchers concluded.

Activities included playing video games, watching TV or DVDs, and surfing or chatting online. Excessive amounts of time were defined as about 2.5 hours daily for each screen activity.

Researchers say their findings could help identify those most likely to develop mental health or behavioral issues, but further study is needed to better understand any possible links.

The study, [published](#) in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, tracked the experiences of some 1,500 [young people](#) in Switzerland over a 10-year period.

## Activities monitored

Researchers noted how much time study participants spent playing video games, chatting or surfing online, and watching TV or DVDs at ages 11, 13, 15 and 17.

The team then checked how participants had been affected by depression, anxiety or [suicidal thoughts](#) at 20—and if they had engaged in [substance use](#), delinquency or aggressive behavior.

Excessive screen users in adolescence were more likely to experience mental health or behavioral issues at 20 than moderate users clocking less than two hours daily for each screen activity.

Researchers caution that the study has limitations—screen times were self-reported by participants themselves and media use has changed significantly since the first data was collected in 2009.

## Follow-up needed

Future studies that use independently recorded data and offer a more detailed breakdown of screen activities—separating chatting from surfing, for instance—would be welcome, the teams says.

There could also be scope to evaluate the benefits that time spent on screen brings to young people—rather than focusing purely on the negative effect.

The team also points out that the findings provide limited insight into the root causes of any associations between screen time and mental health

Future research will be needed to rule out so-called reverse causality—where an effect is erroneously thought to be the cause. The team says this is needed given that young people at risk of mental health issues may be more drawn to spending increasing amounts of time on screen.

Lead researcher Xinxin Zhu, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Philosophy, Psychology and Languages Sciences, said, "Regardless of the direction of causality, our findings highlight that screen use histories may flag the risk of a range of [mental health](#) and behavioral issues. Those who display high or escalating levels of screen use may thus benefit from screening."

**More information:** Xinxin Zhu et al, Trajectories of Screen Time across Adolescence and Their Associations with Adulthood Mental Health and Behavioral Outcomes, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*

(2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-023-01782-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01782-x)

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