

## Hidden Danger of Online Gaming for Teenagers Revealed

Online gaming can be a fun and engaging pastime, but research is showing for one group it comes with hidden dangers.

It's no secret more teenagers than ever are playing online video games, but for some the pastime has become hugely problematic. A new study by Macquarie University found close to three per cent of teenagers could have a diagnosable condition known as Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). IGD has been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) since 2013.

The study of around 1000 teens found roughly 10 per cent had a "problem" with video gaming and a further three per cent showed signs of IGD. "Anyone can develop a screen addiction, but my research shows kids are more at risk if they have issues with impulse control and if their basic needs - self-esteem, being included, feeling good at things and being in control - are being met better online than offline," study author Associate Professor Wayne Warburton said.

Earlier this year, the same team published a series of case studies of children aged 11-13 which showed excessive use of video games including Minecraft, Roblox, Fortnite, Call of Duty, or Counter Strike: Global Offensive, as well as those struggling with other digital mediums like social media.

Cases included threats of self harm and becoming physically violent with parents when their screen of choice was withheld. Young people who have yet to fully develop willpower and self-control are particularly at risk of falling into harmful behavioural patterns.

For a small number of people, video games can result in serious behavioural issues and impact other aspects like schoolwork, relationships and mental health.

"Online interaction doesn't provide the same level of complex mental stimulation and physical contact as seeing friends in real life," Associate Professor Warburton said. "A lot of what we do in games and social media is repetitive, and doesn't use a lot of brainpower."

He explained excessive use of video games can cause the brain to atrophy, which was detectable in brain scans of heavy screen users.

“The brain is the ultimate use-it-or-lose-it organ. It changes second by second, and when we’re working it hard, the brain develops new connections to keep up. If it’s not being challenged, it may be losing connections,” he said.

“That would be a concern for people of any age, but it is particularly worrying for brains that are still developing.” Excessive gaming can also cause the brain to atrophy, which is detectable in brain scans of heavy screen users.

Excessive gaming can also cause the brain to atrophy, which is detectable in brain scans of heavy screen users. Warning signs of IGD include teens spending an increasing amount of time in their bedrooms, falling school grades, lying about how much time they are spending on gaming, and abandoning pastimes and friendships they used to enjoy.

Those affected may become tired and irritable and possibly even become aggressive or violent if anyone tries to come between them and the game.

The team from Macquarie is calling for volunteers to take part in a trial for a new treatment program for problematic gaming designed in conjunction with academics from Hamburg University.

If you feel you or a family member needs support in this area, please reach out to [Lifeskills Australia](#) on [1800 870 080](tel:1800870080) or email us at [info@lifeskillsaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@lifeskillsaustralia.com.au) and book an appointment with one of our clinicians.