

Too Much TV Can Make You Depressed

A new study adds to a growing body of research showing that too much TV is as bad for your psyche as it is for your body. What can you do? Limit your TV time as much as possible to help you stay happy and healthy.

Research has already shown that watching **less** television can make you happier. A new study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* has found that the opposite is also true. That is, watching too much TV can make you depressed, anxious, and altogether out of sorts.

The researchers used data collected from extensive surveys filled out by 3,920 Scottish adults. One survey was devoted to psychological health and measured signs of depression and anxiety. Another measured how much physical activity the participants got, and how much time they spent doing sedentary activities like watching television. The researchers also collected data on physical health, such as body mass index, smoking behavior, and intake of fresh produce and alcohol.

Roughly 70 percent of the adults reported watching television for more than two hours per day. Perhaps not surprisingly, longer television watching was associated with increased obesity, lower intake of fresh produce, and decreased physical activity.

Increased television watching was also correlated with decreased psychological health. More specifically, as hours of television increased, so too did a person's level of depression and anxiety.

WHAT IT MEANS: As with kids who watch too much television, adults get stressed out and depressed from too much screen time and sedentary behavior. "We are seeing that too much sedentary behavior has more and more harmful health effects," says the study's lead author Mark Hamer, PhD, senior research fellow in the department of epidemiology and public health at University College London. And in this case physical exercise didn't seem to help, though past research has shown it improves mental health.

In Hamer's study, people who watched more than two hours of television a day but got the recommended 30 minutes of exercise per day were still more likely to feel depressed and anxious.

Hamer says it's unclear why TV seems to have this effect on people. The bottom line? "Try to limit sedentary TV time as much as possible," Hamer says.

Television- and Screen-Based Activity and Mental Well-Being in Adults (2010) Mark Hamer, Emmanuel Stamatakis, Gita D. Mishra, PhD *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*