When Too Much Gaming Becomes an Addiction

by LANA BARHUM

Video Game Addiction

It's important to monitor your child's online activity. You want them to stay safe, and build healthy habits. Video game addiction is yet to be recognized by the American Medical Association, but it is still a genuine problem for many people. Online gamers usually play video games to escape from the realities and problems of the real world.

A second study reported in Psychological Science finds that 1 in 10 gamers under the age of 18 are considered pathological gamers. These players spend twice as much time gaming than non-pathological gamers do, and they receive poorer grades and suffer from attention problems.

Who's at Risk for Developing a Video Game Addiction?

Risk factors associated with video game addiction may include:

- Being young.
- Living alone.
- Not being conscientious.
- Dealing with high levels of moodiness, depressed mood, anxiety, worry, fear, anger, frustration, guilt and envy, a psychosocial personality trait called neuroticism.
- Having poor psychosomatic health.

Signs of Video Game Addiction

Spending too much time gaming does not necessarily mean you have a gaming addiction.

According to the Pew Research Center, 43% of American adults play video games on the computer, TV, electronic device, or a gaming console. Most of these adults play games safely and without harmful effects on their mental and physical health.

As with other addictions, video game addiction has warning signs. It is important to know these signs if you or someone you care about is a constant gamer.

Signs of a video game addition may include:

- Playing for long periods of time.
- Thinking about gaming while participating in other activities.
- Gaming to get away from real life problems, including depression and anxiety.
- Lying to friends and family to hide gaming habits.
- Feeling moody when unable to play games.

- Being isolated and dropping out of social networks and giving up interests.
- Fatigue.
- Migraines resulting from eye strain.
- Bad hygiene.

Negative Effects

A video game addiction can have negative effects on both your mood and body, especially in younger people.

Some significant concerns, especially for younger people may include:

- **Sedentary lifestyle.** Hours spent being sedentary can take a toll on the body and lead to problems with weight and posture and it increases the risk for type 2 diabetes in children and teens.
- **Lack of social involvement.** Video games might be engaging but they do not prepare children for socialization. It is important to interact in the real world, as this is a vital skill set.
- **Concentration and attention problems.** Rapid movements and fast-paced action from video games may lead to concentration problems and difficulty with prolonged attention.
- **Increased anger, aggression or violence.** Children and teens who spend too much time playing games of combat and violence may be more aggressive than those who do not play these games.
- **Seizures.** There is a risk of seizure activity in some players. Seizures might be related to graphics, flashing lights and colors of video games.
- **Stress injuries.** There has been evidence that many habitual gamers have had repetitive stress injuries in their hands and wrists.

Prevention

The best way to prevent a video game addiction is to manage issues that would accompany this addiction, including some of the risk factors. Setting time limits for gaming can help to minimize the potential for addiction to develop.

It is also important to choose other activities, such as reading, housework and spending time with friends and family, over playing video games. Parents should supervise their child's video-gaming habits.

Diagnosing a Video Game Addiction

The idea of video game addiction has only recently gotten attention in the medical community. Non-substance additions are called behavioral addictions, resulting from the body’s biochemical processes induced by excessive activity.

To date, there are no specific standards for diagnosing behavioral addictions. Nonetheless, they are addictions that require treatment – both medical and therapeutic.

If not treated, video game addiction can get out of control, causing problems in every part of your life. At its worst, the addictive behavior is too engaging to stop even with remorse and genuine desire to quit.

Treating Video Game Addiction

The same type of programs that are effective for treating substance abuse addictions are also effective in treating behavioral addictions – like a video game addiction. An effective pogrom for treating video game addiction includes:

- **Diagnosis and evaluation.** Addictions are often accompanied by co-occurring disorders that, if not addressed, can lead to unsuccessful treatment.
- **Therapeutic support.** Some patients exhibit withdrawal signs when they stop participating in addictive

behaviors, including headaches, feelings of panic and anger and insomnia. Therapeutic support can help patients focus on growth, healing and moving forward.

- **Family support.** It is important for family and friends to be a part of their loved one's recovery. They can engage in support groups designed for families, as well as family sessions with the recovering person in treatment.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).** Many experts believe CBT is the best treatment for video game addiction. Therapy involves shifting thoughts and feelings and replacing them with healthier ones, ultimately changing behavior for the better.

How to Get Help

The first step in getting help is admitting you have a problem. Treatment and the recovery process can help you get past your video game addiction and refocus your energy on other activities instead of gaming.

If it is necessary to change your environment, treatment facilitates can provide a temporary environment to help you move past your video gaming impulses.