

ADDICTED TO THE TUBE

Watching television is the world's most popular pastime. But now researchers are warning too much TV can be a bad thing. Here are some tips to keep you off the couch.

Did you ever rush home to catch an episode of "Friends"? Or did you sit anxiously on the edge of your seat during the series finale of "M*A*S*H"? Or do you sing along with the characters from the new up-and-coming show "Glee"? Or did you yell and scream at your television during the FIFA World Cup?

Watching TV is the world's most popular pastime, and according to the December 2009 Nielson data, Americans watch about 35 hours of TV per week—that's almost as much as a full-time job. It has reached the point where many researchers are calling this TV habit an addiction.

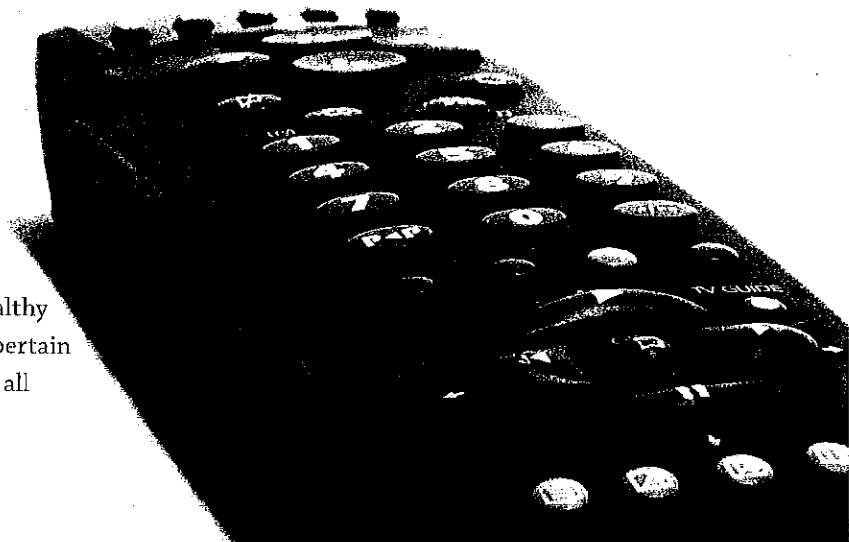
"Wait—an addiction? I'm not addicted to TV. I just watch TV to relax after a hard day's work," you may say. And that's OK.

Watching TV can be especially relaxing and provide fun entertainment. However, it becomes a major issue when people watch so much TV that it causes harmful effects to their mind, body or relationships.

One of the best ways to see if you're addicted to TV is to take a break from it for a week, or even a month. If you are unable to do so, then you may want to reconsider your TV habits. The following list contains a few healthy suggestions that pertain to TV watchers of all genres:

1. Turn off the TV during meals.

This may require you to miss some of your favorite shows but you may be surprised about the negative effects of eating in front of the TV. When families eat meals in front of the tube they often overeat or eat mindlessly, beyond the



point of hunger satisfaction. They also eat more unhealthy foods like pop and potato chips and fewer vegetables.

2. Keep the TV out of the bedrooms.

Having a TV in the bedroom is strongly associated with numerous health and educational problems, including obesity, smoking, sleep problems and poor schoolwork, according to the *New York Times*. It is also 10 times harder to monitor your child's viewing hours and type of shows when the TV is hidden in the bedroom.

3. Monitor the types of shows you watch.

You may not realize it but the types of shows you watch can have a major affect on you, especially violent TV programs. According to surgeongeneral.gov, 61 percent of television programs contain some violence and 44 percent of the violent interactions on TV involve perpetrators who have some attractive qualities worthy of emulation. Also, children who watch violent TV shows are more likely to show aggressive behavior as well as fear that something bad might happen to them. Additionally, studies show those who watch TV before going to bed have a harder time falling asleep.

4. Participate in healthy activities while watching TV.

Instead of wasting precious time as a couch potato, you can concurrently participate in healthy activities and watching TV. That way you can watch your favorite TV show guilt-free. While most people are unable to complete tasks with great mental concentration while watching TV, there are some great low-attention tasks that can be combined with TV.

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HEALTHY ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO WHILE WATCHING TV

1. Exercise.
2. Crafts.
3. Put a puzzle together.
4. Mending and small household items repair.
5. Clean and organize the TV room.
6. Organize collections (CDs, DVDs, craft supplies, etc.)
7. Prepare a grocery list, meal plan or a to-do list.
8. Fold laundry or iron.
9. Clip coupons.
10. Scrapbooking.

ARE YOU A TV JUNKIE?

Many people don't think they're addicted to TV until they take an in-depth look into their TV schedule. Here are a few questions to consider while deciding if you have an addiction problem:

1. Do you watch a great deal of TV (over 3-5 hours a day)?

2. Can you stop watching TV when you want to?

3. Could you go a week, or even a month, without watching TV?

4. Have you made many fruitless attempts to reduce TV usage?

5. Do you feel compelled to watch TV?

6. Have you given up important social, family or occupational activities in order to watch TV?

7. Is watching TV having harmful effects on your life (insomnia, physically, mentally or with your relationships)?

If you said yes to more than two of these questions, you may want to consider monitoring your TV usage or going without TV altogether.