what is
healthy electronic gaming?

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can help us to connect with others, feel socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can help us to have structure and routine in our lives and provides some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

When gaming becomes a problem

Gaming, like any behaviour, can cause harm if it is taken to extreme levels.

- For a very small number of young people, gaming can have a significantly negative impact in their everyday lives.
- These problems seem to be most common for young men between the ages of 12–20 years of age, but can occur in any gamer population.

If you think that your internet use or gaming is beginning to contribute to some problems in your life, there are lots of things you can do to get back in control.

Signs of possible problems with gaming

It is not necessarily the amount of time you spend gaming that causes a problem, but when gaming takes time away from doing activities that keep you healthy and well. For example, you might find that you are spending less time than usual with people you care about. You might be doing less exercise or find that you are having trouble sleeping or getting to school or work. You might be feeling some distress or starting to feel less confident.

If you are experiencing some of these symptoms below, it might be a sign that gaming is starting to have a negative impact on your everyday life:

- feeling sad, irritable, anxious, frustrated or angry when you are not able to access digital or video games
- changing sleep patterns or sleep difficulties such as getting up too early or staying up too late to game
- being aggressive or experiencing conflict with others over gaming
- it's OK to feel frustrated at a loss or situation from time to time but gaming should be a positive experience and if it isn't this may be a sign that something is wrong
- other people expressing concern at the amount of time you spend gaming or online
- spending less time with family and friends than you normally would
- being preoccupied with gaming (spending large amounts of time thinking about the next gaming session or past sessions)
- losing track of time and a loss of control over the time you spend gaming so important things get missed, such as appointments or other commitments
- feeling physical pain or irritation, for example pain in your neck, wrists, or back, dry or red eyes
- eating meals while playing or skipping meals
- spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases
- using gaming as a way of avoiding other activities.

You might also notice other changes in your life that don't appear directly related to your gaming such as:

- loss of interest in school and other activities that you previously enjoyed
- lowered self-esteem or self confidence
- poor eating habits
- headaches/migraines
- decreased personal hygiene
- performing less well at school or work.

Related problems

People who have difficulty with gaming may also be experiencing other mental health conditions, for example, difficulty managing their mood.

Supporting yourself and getting help

Take a "health check" on your gaming and internet use. Is it a fun activity that is helping you to feel good? How is your balance with other activities that keep you healthy and well? Are you feeling more or less connected to others?

There are a lot of tips that can help with keeping your game time in balance. Time on screens can sneak up without you realising it. Here are some things that you could consider.

Leave your internet and gaming time for after your jobs are done. Treat it as a reward.

Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online and set a timer.

Set up times to "unplug".

Make mealtimes screen free.

Have other hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.

Charge your devices outside of your room or perhaps don't have them in your bedroom at all. You will reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.

Get up and move regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.

Take a sleep audit. How much are you getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.

where can I get help

If you find that your relationships, mood, school performance or work are being impacted by your continued or increased gaming use, then it might be useful to talk with someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information. You can also contact **eheadspace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you wanted to talk to somebody about your internet and gaming use.

With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives.