

Long hours of video-game playing might not be so bad

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Noah Bakshis, 15, plays a computer video game titled "Dust: An Elysian Tail" at his home in Plainfield, Illinois. John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune/TNS

CHICAGO — Roman Rivera is crazy about video games. As a kid, his parents put limits on how many hours he could play. He avoided the limits by secretly playing his Game Boy after bedtime.

Now, at age 21, he plays video games up to four hours a day.

Rivera was an "A" student in high school. Today, he is studying at the University of Chicago, one of the country's best universities. He thinks playing video games helped him get there.

Rivera said video games made him interested in more things. They have also made him smarter, he said. "Without a doubt they have benefited me," he said.

The Studies Have Much To Say

Rivera may be right. New studies have found that gaming actually may be good for kids. Scientists have linked gaming with better brain power and making better decisions. It may also keep people

from eating too much.

"It seems to have really interesting positive effects," said Daphne Bavelier. She is a professor at the University of Rochester in New York.

Scientists have done thousands of studies on gaming since the 1980s. Most of them found that gaming is bad. The studies said they lead to violence and weight gain.

Younger scientists know more about gaming. They are getting different results, said Christopher Ferguson. He is a professor at Stetson University in Florida.

Ferguson said violent video games do not make kids violent. He found the opposite. Children who play violent games may be less likely to be bullies, he said.

Ferguson thinks kids use video games to express strong feelings. They also may be too busy playing to be bullies, he said.

Play More, Eat Less

Matthew Grizzard had another view on violence in gaming. He is a professor at the University of Buffalo in New York. He did a study. Kids who played the evil characters in shooter games often felt bad about it, he found.

Chennan Liu did a study at the University of Illinois. She found that video games can make kids healthier. People who play video games for three to six hours a day were thinner than those who played less.

She thinks kids playing video games move around more than kids who just watch TV. Playing games may make them less likely to pick up a snack or a soda. If they have a controller in their hands it is harder to eat, she said.

That theory made sense to Dan Wojtowicz, age 18. He is a high school student in Illinois. Wojtowicz spends up to seven hours a day playing video games.

He said when he goes on long gaming streaks he is not as hungry. "I can go without eating for three to four hours."

Gaming Versus Other Activities

The most interesting studies look at how gaming affects the brain. Simone Kuhn is a scientist in Germany. She found that gamers' brains grow stronger in some ways. The changes could improve memory.

Not everyone agrees that gaming is good for you. Joseph Bisoglio is a gaming expert at Columbia University Medical Center in New York. The studies do not compare gaming with other activities. Learning a new language may be better for the brain than gaming, he said. Learning a musical instrument could be too.

Doug Bakshis was not happy when his son began to play for hours at a time. His son, Noah, has autism. It affects his social skills. Then Noah started opening up more.

Noah is now 15. He says he has more interests because of gaming. His attention and focus have improved.

He also makes better decisions, he said.

Gamers can get attached to characters in video games. "And that's not a bad thing," Noah said.

Quiz

- 1 Which selection from the article explains one possible problem of spending too much time playing video games?
- (A) His son, Noah, has autism. It affects his social skills. Then Noah started opening up more.
 - (B) Noah is now 15. He says he has more interests because of gaming. His attention and focus have improved.
 - (C) Simone Kuhn is a scientist in Germany. He found that gamers' brains grow stronger in some ways.
 - (D) Learning a new language may be better for the brain than gaming, he said. Learning a musical instrument could be too.
- 2 Which sentence from the section "Play More, Eat Less" explains that video games might be better for kids than some other activities?
- (A) Kids who played the evil characters in shooter games often felt bad about it, he found.
 - (B) Wojtowicz spends up to seven hours a day playing video games.
 - (C) She thinks kids playing video games move around more than kids who just watch TV.
 - (D) "I can go without eating for three to four hours."
- 3 Which sentence from the section "The Studies Have Much To Say" BEST summarizes the article as a whole?
- (A) New studies have found that gaming actually may be good for kids.
 - (B) "It seems to have really interesting positive effects," said Daphne Bavelier.
 - (C) Most of them found that gaming is bad.
 - (D) They are getting different results, said Christopher Ferguson.
- 4 Which paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] BEST supports the main idea of the article?
- (A) Now, at age 21, he plays video games up to four hours a day.
 - (B) Roman Rivera is crazy about video games. As a kid, his parents put limits on how many hours he could play. He avoided the limits by secretly playing his Game Boy after bedtime.
 - (C) Rivera was an "A" student in high school. Today, he is studying at the University of Chicago, one of the country's best universities. He thinks playing video games helped him get there.
 - (D) Rivera said video games made him interested in more things. They have also made him smarter, he said. "Without a doubt they have benefited me," he said.