

how to balance screen time

for a healthy headspace

The internet has changed the way we work, socialise and relax, with a lot of these activities now happening online. It has added a lot of value to our lives.

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

The research is unclear how much screen time is too much. What is clear however, is that it is important to keep a healthy balance of online and offline activities in our lives.

Not all screen time is the same. Screens and devices have become essential for us to do our work, and can be excellent learning devices. We can use them to connect with others, get support, master new skills, relax and have fun. Some online activities help us learn and be productive, whilst others provide downtime and enjoyment. However, there are other online activities that are less productive or maybe unhealthy, for example distressing games or if the content you are watching is not making you feel good. So not all screen time is equally valuable.

signs that your screen time is becoming unhealthy

It is important to think about the impact that your screen time is having on your life in each of these areas below.

- **Exercise:** Research has linked screen time with an increased amount of sedentary behaviour in children and teens, and we know that being active is good for our physical and mental health. Are you still making time to move? Play sport or be more active?
- **Sleep:** is VERY important. If you are gaming when you would normally be sleeping you might need to turn off a little earlier or move your device out of your bedroom. Most young people need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep per night to be at their best, both physically and mentally.
- **Social time:** Being connected to others helps us feel good. We can connect with others online but it is important to see people we care about too. Are you making time to regularly meet up with friends and family?
- **Variety of activities:** are you keeping up with your school tasks and work? Are you doing a variety of other activities that you enjoy like reading, music or other hobbies? Do you make time to stop and eat well? Don't let other activities slip off the radar, they are important for you too.
- **Conflict, irritability and stress:** if you are getting into conflict with others about your gaming or are feeling irritable, sad or tense when you game or can't game, it might be time to think about the balance of screen time in your day.
- **Money:** are you spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases? This can become a problem for some people too.

supporting yourself and getting help

The amount of time you spend on your screen can sneak up without you realising it. What can you do if your screen time has gotten out of balance?



Get other activities done first before you relax online. For example do some exercise, get your homework and chores done, walk the dog and spend time with your family before turning on your device. Treat it as a reward.



Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online, then set a timer to help you stay within that time limit.



Schedule in some 'no screen times' during your day. Set up times to 'unplug'.



Make mealtimes screen free.



Make sure you have offline hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.



Exercise while you game, by getting up and moving regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.



Work out how much sleep you are getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.



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

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.



where can I get help

If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace.org.au, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.



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If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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