InformationWeek
BUSINESS INNOVATION POWERED BY TECHNOLOGY

Video Game Playing Linked To Health Risks

Adults who play video games are more likely to report being overweight, depressed, and in poor health than those who don't play.

By Thomas Claburn, InformationWeek
Aug. 18, 2009
URL: http://www.informationweek.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=219400496

Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Emory University and Andrews University have found that men who play video games are more likely to report a higher body mass index (BMI) than men who don't play video games and that women players are more likely to report depression and poor health.

The study, "Health-Risk Correlates of Video-Game Playing Among Adults," is scheduled to appear in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine (AJPM), Volume 37, Issue 4 (October 2009). It is based on self-reported survey data gathered in 2006 from over 500 adults, age 19 to 90, in the Seattle-Tacoma area. Among the respondents, 45.1% played video games, 55.9% of whom were men.

"Video-game players reported more depression, lower extraversion, and greater psychoticism than nonplayers," the study states. "Differences are also evident for three of the five measures in the health-assessment domain: Videogame players reported lower health status, a higher frequency of poor-mental-health days, and higher BMI."

While video game playing is typically seen as an activity of children and teenagers, the average age of video game players is 35, according to the Entertainment Software Association.

Both men and women video gamers tend to turn to the Internet for social support, rather than family and friends.

The study suggests that women may use video games as a form of self-medication, to take their minds off of worries. Men, the study says, look to video games as a way to socialize. Video game players in general reported less extroversion than their non-playing peers.

The study states that "conclusions about causality cannot be made," which is to say that video game playing isn't implicated as the cause of the cited health effects. Rather, the study's aim is to evaluate the hypothesis that there are health differences between video game players and non-players, and to justify further research on the subject.

A companion piece in the AJPM by Brian A. Primack acknowledges that video games are diverse and that many have positive aspects that may enhance education, social skills, and problem solving. The challenge, and the purpose of such studies, he suggests, should be to understand and harness the positive aspects of video games while limiting the negative aspects like sedentary behavior and social isolation.