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Heavy Gaming: Is Your Brain at Risk of Permanent Damage?

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"Playing video games too much can be bad for your mental health."

Gaming is undoubtedly an exciting experience. It is easy to lose track of time while immersed in intense combat or exploring new worlds. However, while gaming can provide a delightful escape, excessive gaming can have harmful effects that are often overlooked. Let us explore the dangers of excessive gaming in more detail, particularly when it develops into Internet Gaming Disorder or IGD.

Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD): What is it?

Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) is far more than just a term for excessive gaming. In this condition, gaming dominates your life, pushing aside social connections, meals, and even sleep. Individuals with IGD often play for prolonged periods—even days—without adequate sleep. Over-gaming has led to dire consequences, with 24 reported fatalities worldwide [1].

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These cases, which primarily included young males in their teens and twenties, frequently featured extended periods of gaming in internet cafes. Most of them were engaged in action-packed online games for hours. At least 12 of the deaths in these 24 cases happened in internet cafes. The severe physical strain of continuous gaming caused a variety of causes of death, including heart attacks, strokes, and blood clots. This demonstrates the dangers of excessive gaming when it diverts into the IGD area.

Brain Health: The Negative Effects of Gaming Marathons

Excessive gaming disrupts your brain's natural processes, affecting memory, focus, and decision-making. Studies show frequent gamers struggle more with these areas than moderate players. Like any muscle, your brain needs rest and variety; without breaks, you risk "digital dementia"—a decline in cognitive abilities like early-onset dementia.

IGD and Mental Health: A Negative Feedback Loop

Playing video games too much can be bad for your mental health. IGD gamers frequently isolate themselves from friends and family due to anxiety and despair. They play to relieve stress, but the more they play, the worse their anxiety gets. This leads to an endless cycle. Prolonged gaming also contributes to a sedentary lifestyle, sleep deprivation, and even substance misuse, all of which adversely impact brain function.

Real-Life Example: A Heartbreaking Result

A teenage South Korean named Lee died in 2005 following a 50-hour gaming binge. He quit his job to play more games. He played in an internet cafe for days with short breaks. Heart failure and exhaustion killed him shortly after he stopped playing. Lee's and other cases show IGD's risk factors. Even though not everyone with IGD has such catastrophic outcomes, the physical and psychological effects are clear.

Malaysian world class e-sport athlete

Taking Control of Your Games Habit

Moderate gaming is relaxing and connecting, but balance is crucial. Why are

you gaming for hours—to avoid stress or boredom? Understanding why can help you recover control. No virtual world is worth damaging your health. Take breaks, stretch, and do other things—your brain and future self will thank you!

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