Study suggests video game playing may have mental health benefits under some conditions

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A team of mental health, human behavior and economic specialists

affiliated with several institutions in Japan has found that under the right conditions, playing video games may be good for mental health.

In their study, [published](#) in the journal *Nature Human Behavior,* the group sent questionnaires to people sequestered at home during the COVID-19 lockdown, some of whom were able to purchase video game consoles and games during a lottery.

Prior research has found mixed results regarding the [mental health](#) impacts of regular, long-term playing of video games. Some have suggested it can lead to addictive symptoms; in teens, it may lead to [social isolation](#), and in some cases, [aggressive behavior](#). The World Health Organization went so far as to classify "gaming disorder" as a [mental illness](#).

Other studies have suggested such findings are overblown. One of the problems those in the field have encountered while attempting to study such impacts is quantification difficulty—most studies have been done in controlled environments, which could have impacted results.

For this new study, the research team found an opportunity to study the impact of video games on large numbers of people outside of a lab—people stuck at home during the early days of the pandemic.

During the lockdown in Japan, demand for video game consoles and associated games skyrocketed. Console makers attempted to make things fair by holding lotteries—winners had the option of purchasing either a Sony PlayStation 5 or a Nintendo Switch; losers had to find other ways to amuse themselves.

The research team realized this represented an opportunity to test the impact of [video game](#) playing on a captive group of players. They created a questionnaire designed to measure mental health and the

amount of time spent playing games and sent it to people participating in the lotteries. They received 97,602 of them, filled out and ready for analysis.

The research team found a pattern in the responses—people playing video games appeared to have a greater sense of life satisfaction, a key component of mental health, than those who were not playing games. They also found that the benefits had limits: Those playing more than three hours a day experienced the same benefits as those playing just three hours a day.