

TELEVISION AND SENIORS



ACTIVITIES

It might surprise you to learn that older adults watch more television than younger people do. Watching TV comprises most of the leisure time for adults aged 70 to 105 years old.

Television can be an avenue to learning new things, connecting with the world, creating a diversion, and providing some light entertainment. However, it can also supplant physical or recreational activities and real-world interactions.



Pluses and Minuses

If you are mindful, there are certainly benefits to TV for our older adults. As they become less able to go out to movies, concerts, or spectator sports, TV can fill this void.

While some sitcoms and light viewing can help to relieve depression, sometimes the news or similar shows can make a depressed mood worse. It is important to pay attention to what our loved ones are watching and find a suitable balance.

The most notable down-side to excessive TV watching is some decrease in mobility. In general, a sedentary lifestyle choice can be detrimental to bone health, cellular/immunity function, and cardiovascular efficiency. Excessive TV use has been linked with a greater risk for Type 2 diabetes, obesity, lower life satisfaction, and an increased risk for dementia.

Excessive TV viewing has also been linked with cognitive decline. This can be because viewers are not spending as much time doing things that can keep their minds sharp such as reading, playing board games, talking with friends and relatives, or working on puzzles. If they eagerly engage in conversation with you during a show, it can be an indication to you that they are simply using the TV to pass time and would prefer another outlet. It can help both you as the caregiver and your loved one to spark conversations based on the shows they are watching. Use open ended questions like "What decision would you have made in that situation?" or "When was the last time you did x activity?" or "Who does that character remind you of?". You can also use a board game or book that is depicted in a show as a cue to suggest playing that game or start reading that book with your loved one.

Source: [Medical News Today](#) and [National Institutes of Health](#)



If TV has become an outlet for your loved one, try to ensure that they are also getting plenty of exercise and movement during the rest of the day. It can be helpful to set up a habit of having them stand up and stretching during commercials or take a walk to another room between shows. Incorporate exercises that can be done from a seated position into their day. On a nice day, suggest a quick walk outside or to a nearby window to watch "reality TV."

What Are They Watching?

If your loved one is spending more than four hours a day watching TV, it is possible that they are simply using it to pass time, rather than to provide practical information or relaxation. If they cannot tell you what they just watched, it might be time to find an activity that is more brain engaging for them.

If they insist on using the TV as an activity, perhaps ensure that their programming selection includes some of the following to help keep their spirits up:

-  Light-hearted sitcoms
-  Uplifting dramas
-  Educational programs
-  Sports or reality TV
-  Movies from when they were young adults

Source: [Center for Media Literacy](#)



Where Are They Watching?

While cable TV and network programming continue to be the most accessible, more viewers are turning to streaming, where they have control of what they watch and when. These can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection and the correct hardware.

If your loved one has a smart TV, most streaming services can be accessed directly through the TV interface. If you set this up for them, make sure to check the “remember me” box in the setup screen so that your loved one only needs to turn the TV on to watch their favorite shows.

If your older adult does not have a smart TV, they will need a separate device to help manage the streaming services.

Source: [Medical Alert Systems](#)



Happiness Quotient

A new study by the University of Maryland concludes that unhappy people watch more TV, while people who describe themselves as very happy spend more time reading and socializing.

Analyzing 30-years’ worth of data, the Maryland researchers report that spending time watching television may contribute to viewers’ happiness in the moment, with less positive effects in the long run.

Source: [Phys.org](#)