

Television Viewing by Older Adults

There is a general trend for adults to watch a larger quantity of television as they age. Indeed, adults over the age of 65 have been shown repeatedly to watch more television (TV) than any other age group. However, the pros and cons of TV viewing by older adults are seldom talked about. Is this a harmless activity for passing time? What should older adults be aware of in regards to this topic? Are alternative activities available that can fulfill the same intended purpose of watching television? These are some of the questions that I hope to answer in this article.

There are many reasons that older adults give for watching television. This age group often has more free time due to retirement and are also more likely to lack mobility, which can restrict which leisure activities can be chosen. Other reasons that older adults give for viewing TV include staying connected with the world. Certainly, TV has been shown to be an effective means of disseminating information quickly to a large amount of people. Many older adults say they use it as a temporary escape from daily life. Similarly, it has been said that TV can be a source of comfort by allowing an individual to feel as though they are not alone. When the TV is used moderately for these purposes, there is little concern about potential negative effects. However, an excessive amount of television viewing has been correlated with greater physical and mental health risks.

It has been hypothesized that the reason TV viewing is correlated with these risks is that this is a sedentary activity both cognitively (mentally) and physically. If one is restricted physically, but would like to be engaged mentally, there are a number of alternative activities. Some of these include reading a book or newspaper, writing for yourself or others, putting together a puzzle, or participating in an arts and crafts hobby. Can you think of some other activities that may work for you?

Not only are these alternatives positive because they are mentally stimulating, but they also do not expose the individual to unnecessary commercials. Older adults need to be aware that they are often the targeted population for advertisements. Companies may promote a product using information that is not factual and that is intended to make older adults feel as though they need the company's product or services. If you feel that a product may be too good

to be true, it would likely benefit you to gather more information before deciding to become a consumer.

If you feel as though you are watching more television than you would like, there are a few steps that you can take to improve your chances of changing your behavior. First, ask yourself what need TV viewing is fulfilling in your life. Next, come up with ideas for other activities which may fulfill the same need. Finally, try a few alternative activities out and keep at it. Generally, it takes about three weeks for a person to become comfortable with a new routine. Enjoy your exploration!

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