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No Longer Just “Child’s Play”

Electronic Gaming in Canada

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Ever since *Pac-Man* and *PONG* began filling arcades with eager players decades ago, video games have exploded in popularity and have become a common form of recreation in Canada. Fuelled by the spread of personal computers and gaming consoles, the electronic game industry is now big business, generating \$2.3 billion to Canada’s GDP in 2012 alone – the third-largest video game industry in the world.¹

Canadians are surrounded by a range of devices and platforms that support electronic gaming. More than six in 10 (62%) Canadians surveyed in 2014 reported having at least one video game console in their household.² Electronic games are more common than ever due to the proliferation of smartphones (owned by 62% of surveyed Canadians),³ which allow people of all ages to play games with each other regardless of location. Personal computers are the most prevalent of all, owned by 85% of surveyed Canadian households.⁴

Once considered “child’s play,” Canadians of all ages now play video games on a regular basis: in a 2014 survey, 54% of Canadians reported having played a computer or video game in the past month and the average age of people who reported playing video games was 33 years.⁵ Recent data from Statistics Canada also show that “gamers” can be found in all age groups: 57% of 16- to 24-year-olds, 36% of 25- to

44-year-olds, 25% of 45- to 64-year-olds and 27% of online Canadians aged 65 and older reported using the Internet to play games in 2012.⁶

Data from the 2010 General Social Survey on time use in Canada indicated that among those who reported playing video games, the average time spent on this activity was 2 hours 20 minutes per day – up from 1 hour 48 minutes in 1998.⁷ Younger Canadians are more likely than their older counterparts to play frequently, particularly among the male population. In 2011, nearly one-quarter (23%) of surveyed students in grades 7-12 reported playing video games “daily or almost daily” – but the proportion was much higher among boys (37%) than girls (9%). However, not all youth are interested: in the same survey, 10% said that they “do not play video games.”⁸

There has been some debate over the relationship between video games and health. Most electronic gaming is a form of sedentary behaviour, which is associated with a range of deleterious physical health outcomes.⁹ However, some modern consoles (e.g. Nintendo Wii and Xbox Kinect) *do* incorporate physical activity in the gameplay. Some are even being used by doctors and organizations to help improve motor function in patients who are recovering from stroke.¹⁰

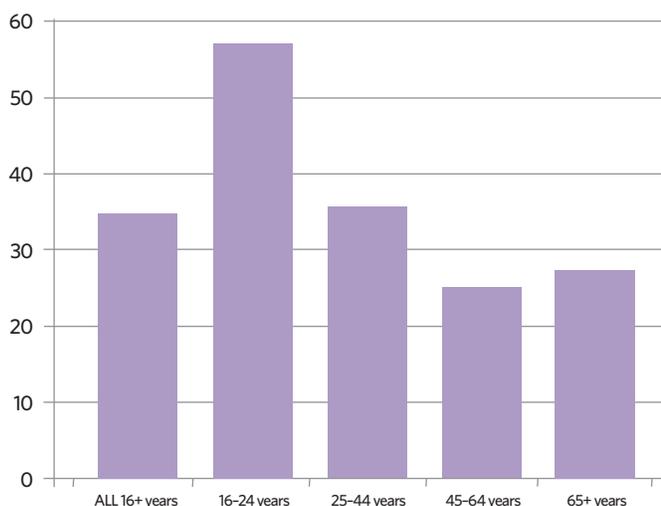




There's no denying the increasing popularity of video games among Canadians of all ages, particularly as the stigma associated with being a "video gamer" beyond youth continues to erode. Since not all video games *are* sedentary, they can in some cases be used to encourage physical activity – but video games that incorporate physical activity are a relatively recent innovation, and time will tell whether this is a passing novelty or permanent feature of electronic gaming. Like any other recreational activity, video games can provide an opportunity for family members and friends to connect. Many modern video games can be played online, allowing people living far apart to play together in ways that weren't possible in the past. With the continued growth in the prevalence of devices and platforms that support electronic gaming, the popularity of video games will undoubtedly persist as a recreational activity among Canadians. ♡

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Proportion of Online Canadians Who Report Using the Internet to Play Online Games, 2012 (%)



Source: Statistics Canada, "Canadian Internet Use Survey, Internet Use, by Age Group, Internet Activity, Sex, Level of Education and Household Income" (CANSIM table 358-0153), *Canadian Internet Use Survey* (October 2013), accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1avf8au>.

¹ Nordicity, *Canada's Video Game Industry in 2013* (July 2013), accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/H832wU>.

² NPD Group, *Essential Facts About the Canadian Video Game Industry 2014* (custom research performed for the Entertainment Software Association of Canada), accessed December 9, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1zaeyNb>.

³ ComScore, *Mobile Future in Focus 2013* (February 2013), accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1c9vneo>.

⁴ NPD Group.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Statistics Canada, "Canadian Internet Use Survey, Internet Use, by Age Group, Internet Activity, Sex, Level of Education and Household Income" (CANSIM table 358-0153), *Canadian Internet Use Survey* (October 2013), accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1avf8au>.

⁷ Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey, 2010: Overview of the Time Use of Canadians*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 89-647-X (July 2011), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/rickWR>.

⁸ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, *The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students 1991-2011* (2012), accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/N3eWrO>.

⁹ Mark S. Tremblay, Rachel C. Colley, Travis J. Saunders et al., "Physiological and Health Implications of a Sedentary Lifestyle," *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism* (2010), 35:6, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1bgA7SX>.

¹⁰ Heart and Stroke Foundation, *Video Games Show Promise in Stroke Rehab* (November 2012), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1bhm3E4>.