



# VIDEO GAME REHABILITATION AND TREATMENT

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Playing video games is one of the most popular leisure activities in the world and provides known benefits, including improved focus, hand-eye coordination, memory, and multitasking. Most people consider video gaming a hobby or fun pastime, with 75% of American households having at least one gamer in the home. Many gamers say they play video games because it provides mental stimulation, and it's a good way to relax. Some players enjoy the competition, while others like the social component of forming connections and being part of a group effort. Many parents believe video games are educational for their children.

Despite the many positives of gaming, players who use video games to escape real life and avoid stressful situations or negative feelings could fall victim to addictive behavior. Not all researchers agree that video gaming is an addictive activity. Some believe it is a type of impulse control disorder, while others consider it a behavioral addiction. However, not everyone who plays a lot of video games has a gaming problem. An estimated 1% and 2% of gamers fit the proposed criteria for gaming addiction, which is more common in males than in females.

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## Basics of Video Game Addiction

This guide was written to provide an overview of the video game addiction and offer helpful resources for persons recovering from video game addiction.

Like substance use disorders, the first step to overcoming a behavioral addiction is admitting there's a problem. Depending on the severity of the addictive behavior and any co-occurring medical or psychiatric conditions, a video game addiction or gaming disorder may be treated on an inpatient or outpatient basis. Total abstinence from the internet is an impractical goal in today's digital world, but abstinence from [sublimatic gaming](#) applications combined with balanced internet usage is realistic through rehabilitation and treatment. Video game addiction treatment focuses on behavioral modification therapies.

The most common/recommended type of treatment during rehabilitation is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, which is used to guide addicts away from obsessive habits or thought patterns. Basically, it's mental health counseling that teaches gamers how to replace thoughts about gaming to help them change addictive behaviors. Group therapy often provides valuable moral support and motivation that's especially helpful to gamers who've lost friends due to their gaming addiction. Making parents part of the treatment process often helps, especially for younger children. There are also two 12-step programs very similar to Alcoholics Anonymous called [On-Line Gamers Anonymous](#) and [Computer Gaming Addicts Anonymous](#) that some video game addicts might find useful for long-term care.

### Four Steps of the Rehab Process

Here are the four key components of substance abuse treatment:

- Assessment:** This stage centers around tailoring a treatment plan for the individual patient based on type, length, and severity of his or her addiction, as well as any unique challenges that they face (such as co-occurring mental disorders or domestic abuse).
- Detox:** During this phase, the goal is to eliminate your body's dependence on the substance(s), and manage the symptoms of withdrawal.
- Therapy:** The third stage uncovers and treats the underlying cause(s) of the addiction, and it gives addicts the tools to overcome their addiction.
- Aftercare:** The purpose of the last phase is to facilitate the transition into programs that will help to continue the lifelong process of recovery by building on the treatment received in the previous steps and preventing relapses.

For more information, read our guide to the [rehab process](#).

### What Makes Video Game Addiction Rehabilitation Difficult?

Video game addiction was officially classified as a Gaming Disorder by the [World Health Organization](#) in 2018 when it was included in the 11th edition of the International Classification of Diseases ([ICD-11](#)). The American Psychiatric Association added [Internet Gaming Disorder](#) to the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ([DSM-5](#)), but placed it in Section 3, meaning it requires more research and isn't an official diagnosis yet. Studies about treating video game addiction are in the early stages, so the rehabilitation and treatment process may differ by facility or psychologist. Because many mental health experts may not understand this new disorder very well, it may be difficult to get the right type of treatment.

Although the rate of video game addiction is relatively low, there are more than 2.5 billion video gamers around the world and gaming disorder is a growing problem. Several studies have attempted to pinpoint the severity of this new disorder, but they've had varied results. Various surveys indicate that internet gaming disorder affects between 1% and 10% of gamers in North America and Europe. Researchers who studied groups from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany found that 0.2% to 1% of participants fit the criteria for having an internet gaming disorder. Another study discovered that 1.4% of Singapore children are addicted to the internet and gaming, and 22.8% of problem gamers. According to estimates, 10% of Singapore children are addicted to the internet and gaming, and 22.8% of problem gamers in Iran have a video game addiction. Due to the rising problem, some countries have entire psychiatric centers dedicated to treating gaming and internet addictions, while others don't include video game addiction treatment in any addiction programs.

### The Unique Struggle of Video Game Addicts

- isn't well understood, making it difficult to receive appropriate treatment
- isn't well established as a recognized disorder, limiting treatment facilities and financial assistance from insurance companies
- includes withdrawal symptoms, including irritability, anxiety, anger, and cravings to game
- triggers pathways in the brain that releases feel-good dopamine similar to narcotics addiction

### Prevalence for Internet Gaming Disorder

**Demographics of Individuals Exhibiting Internet Gaming Disorder**

According to data presented in 2016 by [The American Journal of Psychiatry](#), the prevalence of internet gaming disorder is higher in males than females. The study with 4,995 females and 5,014 males between the ages of 18 and 24 from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany reported 0.80% of males and 0.56% of females within the group had an internet gaming disorder. However, 2.6% in the study reported five or more indicators of an internet gaming disorder and 7.01% of females and 10.41% of males in the study were preoccupied with internet gaming. If statistics from the [AJP study](#) were expanded, in theory, as many as one million of the more than 160 million Americans who play internet-based games might meet the proposed DSM-5 criteria for on-line game addiction.



According to a SAMHSA's 2015 [Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), women are considerably more likely to seek treatment for mental health disorders. The gender breakdown of treatment and counseling for mental issues was 17.8% female and 10.3% male. While mental health disorders occur in a variety of age groups, the most common age group that received treatment and/or counseling was individuals aged 26 to 49.

### Gamers by Age Group, 2019

Age Group of Gamers in the U.S.	Percentage of Gamers Within Each Age Group
Under 18	21%
18 – 35	40%
36 – 49	18%
50+	21%

Source: [Entertainment Software Association 2019 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry](#)

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## II. Video Game Addiction Withdrawal Process

For some gamers, there may be a type of [detox period](#) lasting three to four days where withdrawal symptoms are more severe. [Withdrawal symptoms](#) may disappear fairly quickly, or they may persist for several weeks or even months, but they eventually fade away. It takes time for a gamer's brain and body to recover from excessive gaming, social isolation, and an unhealthy lifestyle that included chronic sleep deprivation and irregular/poor eating habits.

In the [AJP study](#), 5.20% of participants said they experienced withdrawal after abstaining from video games. The withdrawal process affects people differently, and no two gamers have the exact same experience, but many report common physical, mental, and emotional symptoms. Some of the most frequently reported [withdrawal symptoms](#) include anxiety, restlessness, irritability, depression, impatience, headaches, muscle tension, sleep issues, lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, and cravings to game.

### Withdrawal Symptoms

	Body	Mind/Emotional
<b>Most Reported Withdrawal Symptoms</b>	Nausea Headaches Muscle tension Increased/decreased eating Increased/decreased sleeping	Restlessness Mood swings Anxiety Crying Irritability Impatience and angry outbursts Sadness, loneliness, and/or depression Lack of motivation, interest, pleasure Difficulty with focus and concentration Increased dreaming Craving to game

Sources: [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#) and the [Journal of Mental Health Counseling](#) and [Computer Gaming Addicts Anonymous](#)

For more information about withdrawal, read our guide on [Video Game Addiction](#).

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## III. Treatment for Video Game Addiction

The primary treatments for video game addiction or gaming disorders are behavioral therapies using [standard psychological techniques](#). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is the most recommended treatment because it's shown good results in the treatment of other behavioral addictions/impulse-control disorders. CBT teaches gamers to recognize and modify thought patterns that lead to addictive behavior. Other suggested therapies include Motivational Interviewing, Reality Therapy, and Wilderness Therapy. Support groups are also helpful for some video game addicts when added to other therapies.

There aren't any proven medications specifically for treating video game addiction, but individuals diagnosed with co-occurring depression, social anxiety, or other psychiatric conditions may be treated with medications for these issues. Medication therapy for co-occurring conditions may include antidepressants or anti-anxiety drugs, such as selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors or other [pharmacological treatments](#). If substance abuse is also a factor, medical detox specific to the substance may be required.

### Rehabilitation Settings

Within either an inpatient or outpatient setting, treatments such as detoxification services, behavioral therapies, and medication-assisted treatments are offered for varying lengths of time.

Inpatient treatment involves living full-time (including overnight) at a treatment facility for a set period of time. Outpatient treatment involves scheduled appointments at a facility from which the individual is free to come and go. Within each category, there are several distinctions.

### Sexual Addiction Treatment Programs

Setting	Type of Treatment	Description	Duration	Time Commitment
Inpatient	Short-Term Residential	Intensive treatment, sometimes in a hospital setting. Therapies offered are extensive. Medication-assisted treatment is available to those who qualify.	14-30 days	Hours Per Day: 24
	Long-Term Residential	Intensive treatment in a non-hospital setting, most often a therapeutic community with other patients. Therapies offered are extensive. Medication-assisted treatment is available to those who qualify.	3-12 months	Hours Per Day: 24
	Partial Hospitalization	Intensive treatment in a hospital setting. Patients do not stay overnight. Considered inpatient due to the hospital setting. Extensive services are provided and require a near full-time commitment every week. Medication-assisted treatment is available to those who qualify.	14-30 days	Hours Per Day: 6-8
Outpatient	Intensive Day Treatment	Extensive services of an inpatient program but patients return home each day following treatment. After completion, patients often transition to less intensive counseling. Therapies offered are extensive. Medication-assisted treatment is available to those who qualify.	3-4 months	Hours Per Day: 2-4
	Counseling	Both individual counseling and group counseling focus on short-term behavioral goals to develop coping strategies. Therapies offered are moderate. Medication-assisted treatment is not available.	As long as desired	Hours Per Day: 1-2
	Support Groups	Self-help groups center on maintaining abstinence after another form of treatment. Typically meet one day a week for 1-2 hours.	As long as desired	Hours Per Day: 1-2

Source: [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

### Behavioral Therapies

Behavioral therapy for addiction seeks to identify and manage addictive actions that lead to these behaviors and prevent relapse. The therapy is based on the concept that all behavior is learned, and therefore can be changed through learning coping skills and increasing awareness of negative thoughts and beliefs that contribute to abuse.

### Behavioral Therapies for Video Game Addiction

Type of Therapy	Definition
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy has shown good results in treatment for behavioral addictions and impulse control disorders. It helps video game addicts replace thoughts about gaming and change gaming patterns to help them overcome addictive behaviors. This goal-oriented form of talk therapy helps them replace pathological gaming with healthier habits to lead a more balanced life.

**Further reading:**

- [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#)
- [Psychology Today](#)

Motivational Interviewing	Motivational Interviewing enhances motivation to change addictive behaviors by exploring and resolving the addict's ambivalence and concerns about changing these behaviors. Techniques include affirmation, summarization, reflective listening, and open-ended questions to allow individuals to replace addictive behaviors with new behavioral skills.
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**Further reading:**

- [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#)
- [Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry](#)

Reality Therapy	Reality Therapy encourages individuals to choose to change their addictive behaviors, so they can improve their lives. Addicts commit to change, train in time management, and learn alternative activities to gaming or other problematic behaviors.
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**Further reading:**

- [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#)
- [Psychology Today](#)

Wilderness Therapy	Wilderness Therapy is similar to inpatient treatment, but it takes place in an outdoor group environment. During the lengthy program, video gamers are bonded, and there's very limited access to any electronic gadgets or technology. Program participants interact with nature, develop healthier interpersonal relationships, build self-confidence, and set short-term and long-term life goals with the help of a treatment team.
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**Further reading:**

- [The Open Psychology Journal](#)
- [Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Center](#)

12-Step Therapy	12-Step Therapy is a mutual support therapy used in outpatient settings. Video game addicts participate in support groups that follow the guidelines of traditional 12-step self-help programs and learn to cope with their addiction, avoid triggers that could cause relapse, and live well-balanced lives.
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**Further reading:**

- [Computer Gaming Addicts Anonymous](#)
- [On-Line Gamers Anonymous](#)

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## IV. How to Find Help

### Finding a Rehabilitation Center for Video Game Addiction

Video game addiction is considered a behavioral addiction or impulse control disorder that the World Health Organization has officially dubbed Gaming Disorder. While many people play video games frequently, the number of gamers who meet the diagnostic criteria of having a gaming disorder is relatively small. However, it's a growing problem around the globe. With an estimated 2.5 billion gamers worldwide, even a small percentage of at-risk gamers starts to add up.

Because gaming disorder is comparatively new, finding the right type of help from the right provider might prove difficult. A reputable rehabilitation center or outpatient facility will understand the unique challenges of video game addiction and offer an individualized approach to treatment. Several types of behavioral therapies have been found to help gamers overcome pathological gaming and achieve lasting recovery from video game addiction.

### Our Directory

Our directory of rehab programs includes a comprehensive list of available treatment centers and programs as provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In the directory, you will find tools to filter the programs by setting, price, and location.

Click your state from the list below, then input your zip code to find rehabs near you

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York State
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
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- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
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