Games that involves social contact make us feel better.

Are Video Games Good For Us?

A new study by Oxford University scientists shows that playing video games can improve people's mental health – the way that we think, feel and behave. The research – released just as a new generation of gaming consoles hits UK shops – goes against claims that gaming is bad for people.

The Oxford team decided to see what impact video games had on players' sense of wellbeing – their feelings of long-term comfort, health and happiness. Researchers worked with Electronic Arts (EA) and Nintendo to send survey questions to 3,274 people who spend between four and five hours each week playing the games Plants vs Zombies: Battle for Neighborville or Animal Crossing: New Horizon.

Overall, they found that people who spent more time on the games reported a greater positive sense of wellbeing. The team also found that gamers who were connecting socially with others while playing online were increasingly likely to have a more positive sense of wellbeing than those who played on their own. This suggests that the mental health benefit could come as much from spending time with their friends while gaming as from the act of gaming itself. On the other hand, the researchers also found signs that people who were struggling with their mental health in the real world might get less of a benefit from gaming, and their mental health could even be made worse.

Andrew Przybylski, who led the study, says it shows that people should not be prevented from playing video games. "Play can be an activity that relates positively to people's mental health – and regulating video games could withhold those benefits from players," he said. "This is pretty convincing evidence that we shouldn't expect the worst – at least for these kinds of social games."
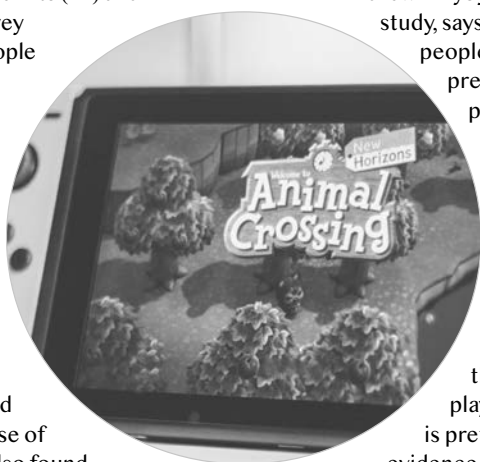
A brief history of video gaming

The earliest video games, created to test the power of computers in the 1950s, were often versions of real-world games, like noughts and crosses. In 1967, a device known as the Brown Box became the first video game system that connected to a TV. Although it never really took off, it helped to inspire further development of home gaming systems, such as the Atari 2600 – which heralded a new age of gaming in 1977. In the years that followed, video games reached new heights, with the release of several classics including Space Invaders and Donkey Kong.
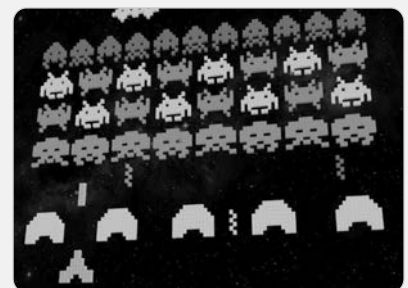
Space Invaders arrived on the Atari in 1980.

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