



Why we love it. Why we must stop.

By Mackenzie Carro

**I**t's 9 p.m. and you're planning to go to sleep soon. You have to be up at dawn for a basketball game. But you want to relax a bit before bed. So you pull up your favorite YouTube channel and press play.

When the video ends, another one starts immediately. One more can't hurt, right? But then you watch a third video. Then a fourth . . . and a fifth . . .

Before you know it, it's 1 a.m. and you haven't even brushed your teeth.

If this scenario sounds familiar, you're not alone. In fact, most Americans admit to binge-watching—that is, watching multiple episodes of a TV show or devoting hour after hour to platforms like YouTube and TikTok in one sitting.

The occasional binge-watch is fun and harmless. But as binge-watching has become **ingrained** in our culture, experts are sounding the alarm. They're saying that all this screen time is making us tired and depressed.

So why do we do it? And how can we stop?

### Your Bingeing Brain

When your parents were kids, there was basically one way to watch shows: on a television. Back then, most series released one episode per week. If a show ended on a cliff-hanger, you had to wait an entire week (in agony!) to find out what happened. Binge-watching was possible only if you rented or bought VHS tapes or DVDs of the show after it aired.

Today, we have streaming services, such as Netflix, Hulu, and Disney Plus, that provide access to entire seasons of a show. Thanks to these platforms, we don't have to wait a week—or even a minute—to find out what happens to Eleven in *Stranger Things*. We just click “Next Episode.”

We don't binge-watch simply because we can though. We binge-watch because our brains make it physically difficult to pull ourselves away. Here's the deal: When you feel pleasure—like when you bite into a gooey brownie or listen to your favorite song—your





brain releases a chemical called dopamine. That chemical is also released when you watch a video you enjoy. Your brain *really* likes this rush of dopamine, so it eggs you on: "One more! One more!"

Our brains are not entirely to blame however. Streaming platforms are designed in a way that keeps us watching. Autoplay, where the next video starts automatically, and commercial-free viewing options mean our eyes stay glued to the screen.

### Bingeing All the Time

Binge-watching isn't all bad. Zoning out with a good show can help you relax and take your mind off your worries for a while. And if you turn it into a special event—such as having friends over for a *Supergirl* marathon—it can be a fun way to socialize.

The problem arises when we binge all the time. A 2017 study found that people who binge regularly are more likely to be **chronically** tired because they stay up later. They are also more **sedentary**. Numerous studies have shown that sitting for long periods of time isn't good for our physical health. Then there is the fact that we often binge-watch by ourselves. Too much time alone in front of a screen has been linked to loneliness and depression.

SHORT  
WRITE

**What attitude toward binge-watching does the author express?**

**1. Write your answer to the question above:**

**2. One piece of text evidence that supports your answer is:**

**3. This evidence supports your answer because:**

Here's another reason not to binge too often: You may not have as much fun. When a show releases one episode per week—as *The Mandalorian* did—it builds excitement and gives people a chance to talk and analyze between episodes. Research suggests that we may actually enjoy shows more when we watch them more slowly.\*

So how do you know when binge-watching goes too far? Skipping out on time with friends and family, missing meals, and skimping on sleep are all signs that it's time to scale back.

### How to Beat the Binge

The good news is that you can beat the binge—with a little practice. Dr. Danesh Alam from Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital recommends deciding at the start of the week how much time to dedicate to shows and videos. You can use Apple's Screen Time tools to track your time on apps. You can also **disable** autoplay on many platforms, including YouTube and Netflix.

If you're still having trouble, **enlist** a friend to help. Plan a screen-free hangout on Saturday afternoons, for example. And when you do binge-watch, take breaks. Walk the dog. Kick a ball around. Have a dance-off between *Mandalorian* episodes (because yes, the entire first season is now available).

And most important? Turn off the screen one hour before bed. This will help you get a good night's sleep. We promise Baby Yoda will still be there tomorrow. ●

Go online for the Short Write Kit. It will help you turn what you just wrote into a great short answer.

\*Research from the University of Melbourne found that viewers enjoyed shows more when they watched one episode per day than when they watched an entire season in one sitting.