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Deadlier than Smoking, More Mind-Altering than Marijuana

What kills more people than smoking and alters your mind more than marijuana?

This thing is potentially the deadliest thing on the planet. More dangerous than guns, illegal drugs, illicit sex, and sugar combined.

And yet almost all of us have it in our homes.

You may have guessed by now that I am referring to the television.

And the language I used above is not hyperbole. It's 100% accurate, backed by mounds of scientific evidence now.

I was reading an issue of Consumer Reports recently that led me on a journey of discovery. As is often the case, they reviewed the top televisions. My subjective analysis shows that the top two most reviewed products in Consumer Reports are cars and televisions. In other words, the second most expensive purchase most of us will make, in which we spend a large percentage of our lives out of necessity, which gets us to work and upon which the safety of our loved ones often depends...and an electronic device primarily used for mind-numbing entertainment. Sure, that makes sense.

As I pondered this oddity, I came across this quote in the television buying guide:

If you watch the TV for five hours a day (the average for Americans), it will reach half-brightness in approximately fifty-four years.

My first thought was ***five hours a day***? If I watched five hours of television a day, I wouldn't be worried about the television's brightness, I'd be worried about my own.

I determined that at five hours of viewing per day, it takes fifty-three years longer for your television to reach half-brightness than it does for your brain to reach the same half-brightness.

So I embarked on a study to find the actual effects of television on our minds and bodies. What I found is that, as a society, *we are literally killing ourselves*.

Television's effect on the body: Deadlier than smoking

Research published in the [*British Journal of Sports Medicine*](#) done on more than 12,000 adults shows that every hour of television watching after the age of 25 lowers the viewer's life expectancy by 22 minutes.

Cigarettes "only" lower life expectancy by 11 minutes.

In other words, someone who watches five hours of television per day is worse off, statistically, than someone who smokes 9 cigarettes.

In the same study, the research showed that people who watch six hours of television per day die, on average, five years sooner than their non-television watching counterparts, regardless of their exercise levels. So, even if you're "hitting the gym" for an hour each day, but still plopping down in front the television, you're going to die sooner. Television is like the exercise neutralizer.

Other data from the [*Journal of the American College of Cardiology*](#) show that people who watch four hours of on-screen video (less than the average American even) are *more than twice as likely* to suffer a deadly or hospitalizing cardiac event compared to those who watch less than two hours. In fact, the increase in "early" death rates from all causes is 48% higher.

Television's effect on the mind: Distorting our view of the world

Numerous studies have shown that the less television we watch, the happier we are.

In other words, less television equals less depression. For many people, they literally have the cure for their depression in their hands (the remote), but yet they continue to watch the depression-inducing machine every day.

Why?

Because it's like a narcotic. For some, it's absolutely addictive. And don't think for one second that every network, cable channel, and advertiser doesn't know that.

Psychologists have found that the more television one watches, the more it distorts their reality. Even (and often especially if) they only watch programs like the news and documentaries. The news and some documentaries sensationalize the negatives in life.

But won't I be cut off from the world?

No. Researchers found that people who watch less television actually judge reality (the risks and rewards of life) more accurately. The more television you watch, the more distorted your view of reality becomes.

It's no surprise when you consider what is on television. The news is all about crime, death, and celebrities gone wild. Sitcoms are primarily about incompetent dads and sleeping with as many people as possible. The crime shows make you think there is a child rapist on every street corner. And Lifetime...well comedian Jim Gaffigan says it best:

My favorite channel is the Lifetime Channel because Lifetime is television for women -- Lifetime: Television for Women. Yet, for some reason, there's always a woman getting beaten on that channel.

I pity the woman who grew up watching Lifetime movies. I mean, how can you possibly expect her to have a healthy relationship?

The reality is that television is not reality. And it's killing us, mind and body.

I know my audience and based on the type of people that read this, I know you watch less television than the average American. Thank goodness!

But even if you only watch a couple of hours per day, I encourage you to be more selective with your time. Knock out thirty minutes a day to start and go for a walk. Or play. Or read a book ([while walking of course](#)).

Action item: Reduce your television watching by thirty minutes per day and record the results.

How much television do you watch per day? What can you do to lower that?