

game

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Dopamine is a universal currency for moving us toward goals. It's the way that you track pleasure; it's the way that you track success. And I want to explain how that process works, because if you understand that process, you'll be in an excellent position to modulate and control your own dopamine release for optimal motivation and drive.

Andrew Huberman, if you don't know by now, is an American neuroscientist who has contributed greatly to science, particularly in fields such as brain maturation and the brain's ability to change and adapt. In the first video about Andrew Huberman and video games, I touched on a lot of what he had to say about dopamine and novelty. If you haven't watched that first video, you can go and watch it after this one. In this one, I'll go into the deep science of dopamine and motivation, how problematic gaming affects our lives as a whole, and what advice Andrew Huberman has for us to optimize and balance a healthy life.

For those who don't know, let's quickly go over what dopamine is and what it does. Dopamine is a universal currency in all mammals but especially in humans for moving us toward goals. How much dopamine is in our system at any one time, compared to how much dopamine was in our system a few minutes ago, and how much we remember enjoying a particular experience in the past, dictates your so-called quality of life and your desire to pursue things. This is really important. Dopamine is a currency. It's the way that you track pleasure; it's the way that you track success; it's the way that you track whether you are doing well or poorly. And that is subjective. But if your dopamine is too low, you will not feel motivated. If your dopamine is really high, you will feel motivated. And if your dopamine is somewhere in the middle, how you feel depends on whether you had higher dopamine a few minutes ago or lower dopamine.

Essentially, dopamine is a neuromodulator—a chemical inside our brain that regulates our levels of motivation, desire, and pleasure. Dopamine plays a huge, if not the main, role in our lives, especially in why and how we act. An important element of how dopamine works is the so-called dopamine baseline and dopamine peaks. Pretty much, the dopamine baseline is the amount of dopamine currently circulating in your body. Dopamine peaks happen when you spend that circulating dopamine on very motivating or pleasurable activities that

spike your dopamine. Why? If you take something or do something that leads to huge increases in dopamine, afterward your baseline should drop because there isn't a lot of dopamine around to keep your baseline going.

I think you can put two and two together. When you engage in a highly stimulating activity like a video game, you instantly release a lot of dopamine from your baseline, causing it to drop and leaving insufficient dopamine to later motivate you to do your work or other responsibilities.

Now you might also be asking, "Does that mean I can't play video games ever again?" Not necessarily. This is just to show you how video games can affect your physiology and psychology. In theory, yes, not playing any video games and focusing on your goals will be an easier path than playing video games while still trying to achieve something in real life. That's actually why I stopped playing video games—because I realized that all the effort I would put into moderating them was effort I could not put into other goals and dreams I had. And for me, I just knew that if my ambitions and my goals constantly had to compete with video games, then those goals and dreams would always lose, and video games would always win.

Now, whether you decide to moderate or quit gaming is entirely up to you, your own specific needs, the amount of dopamine you naturally generate, and the subjective excitement that you get from gaming.

With that said, gaming can definitely affect much more than just dopamine. As an example, sleep is extremely important to our well-being. If you've ever sacrificed sleep to get in those few extra games or stayed up all night gaming, you know the consequences of that are quite severe. In other words, by not getting sufficient duration of sleep, you're not allowing your body and brain to transition through all the different aspects of fuel utilization, and you're not teaching your brain and body how to use similar types of fuels during wakefulness. So again, all this points to the fact that we need to be getting sufficient quality and duration of sleep. Sleep is arguably the most important foundation of a healthy life, and sacrificing it for a game is never worth it.

This also goes for working out and dieting, two other parts of the health trinity. When we game for long periods of time, we're immobile and focused on the screen, making us physically weaker and worsening our posture. I mean, these glasses are certainly a consequence of all the computer time I've had. Spending a lot of time on video games also means that we sacrifice the time we spend cooking healthy meals for instant or pre-made meals or fast food, which are rarely a good source of nutrients. Combine all these things, and you can see how gaming can affect your quality of life in a more significant way.

So, does Andrew Huberman have a solution? Well, here's how to optimize and balance a healthy life according to Andrew Huberman:

“I will suggest a protocol by which you can achieve a better relationship to your activities and to your dopamine system. In fact, it will help tune up your dopamine system for discipline.”

So what is this thing that could help us tune our dopamine system and recover it from problematic gaming? Effort and hard work are, without question, the most powerful aspects of dopamine in our biology. And the beautiful thing is, it's accessible to all of us.

As we've discussed, dopamine release from video games lowers the amount of dopamine we have, and that makes us more bored and less likely to engage in more difficult things, which are usually the things we should be doing. So what can be done about this? Don't spike dopamine prior to engaging in effort, and don't spike dopamine after engaging in effort. Learn to spike your dopamine from effort itself.

The whole point of realizing that you may have a problem with gaming and then choosing to either moderate significantly or quit entirely is that you want to actually improve your life. You want to improve yourself and your life, and that's why you're probably watching this video. This improvement, as mentioned, requires work and sacrifices, and things like building real-life skills, learning, working, and abstaining require effort.

If you struggle with gaming, your goal should be to get the same—or a similar amount of—excitement you get from gaming from engaging in your self-improvement journey. The main way to do this when it comes to dopamine is to do the classic dopamine detox. Detoxing doesn't only mean not engaging in gaming at all; it depends on you, as it is very individual. Perhaps for some people, detoxing may mean cutting their gaming time by a lot; for others, quitting entirely. Certainly, if you want the best benefits—the most benefits—then quitting entirely, at least for 30 to 90 days, will give you that. And really, I just encourage you to try it.

Naturally, when you try this detoxing, you get a jump start on your self-improvement and building a new version of yourself. The first way is that you recover that baseline of your dopamine; the other way is that you begin to prioritize the mentioned things like school, work, and other habits which normally get neglected when you're so focused on gaming as a priority instead of as a hobby. If you cut your gaming time to less, or even none, obviously you can focus on more quality habits: things like sleep, working out, your hygiene, eating healthy meals, and so on.

The key is that problematic gaming is just that—it generates problems, problems that can make some or all other areas of your life suffer. Now it's on you to take the first step in order to fix them.

So, if you want to learn more about dopamine and another part of dopamine in gaming called novelty that I didn't mention in this video, then check out this video.