

10 healthy ways to **BINGE TV**

Your favourite pastime doesn't have to be bad for you

Brits watch four hours and 31 minutes of TV each day*. With cliffhangers keeping us hooked, 63% of us enjoy bingeing two or three episodes per session. But what is this doing to our health? According to researchers in Hong Kong, people who watch two hours or more of TV a day are 12% more likely to develop heart disease. But don't worry, this doesn't mean you have to abstain from your guilty pleasure completely. Simple tweaks to your viewing habits can bring surprising benefits. So grab the remote and ditch the guilt. Here's what you need to know.

1 Set the scene

TV on the wall? Ideally, the screen needs to be 42 inches from the floor to the centre of the screen to align with eye level. And don't sit too close. The experts at Panasonic say the perfect viewing distance for an HD TV is roughly 1.5 to 2.5 times the screen size.

2 Don't dim the lights

While sitting in the dark can mimic that cinematic experience, it could cause problems. Having the glare of the screen as the only light in the room can cause temporary eye strain and discomfort due to the high contrast between the bright screen and the surrounding darkness. This forces your eyes to constantly adjust, leading to possible fatigue and headaches.

3 Take loo breaks

Ignoring a full bladder because you don't want to miss any action? Press the pause button, says intimate health expert Stephanie Taylor, founder of Kegel8. 'While holding it in can be tempting, it can cause harmful bacteria to build up, leading to a urinary tract infection.' Plus, 'It can also cause the pelvic muscles in your bladder to lose the ability to contract when needed, which can cause urinary retention that then makes it hard to empty your bladder.'



4 Give eyes TLC

Wide-eyed screen-staring can mean not blinking enough. 'Special exercises can help reduce eye strain, while blinking replenishes the tear film and gets rid of any surface debris,' says eye expert Dilip Darjee.

- * Close your right eye and cover it with your right hand, lightly touching your eyelid with your fingers. Start blinking with your left eye.
- * Massage the left side of your forehead.
- * Repeat for two mins, then switch sides.

Health and wellbeing

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Enjoy a rewatch

Watching repeats gives a sense of comfort and predictability, in an otherwise unpredictable world. 'Knowing the outcome of a story provides a feeling of safety, triggering warm feelings of nostalgia,' says psychologist Smriti Joshi. Favourite films and shows can also create a strong sense of connection, helping to beat loneliness, says US research.



7 Skip the horror movie

Watching stimulating content before bed isn't the best idea, as it can increase brain activity and heart rate, release dopamine and cause emotional arousal – better avoid the saucy romcoms, then! This can make it harder for you to drop off, reduce sleep quality and disrupt the natural sleep-wake cycle. Whatever you watch, switch off an hour before bed. 'Blue light from your TV disrupts the brain, which is why screen time last thing at night – or first thing in the morning – is so detrimental,' says neuroscientist Dr Rachel Taylor.

8 Have a foot workout

Staying active helps strengthen feet and maintain agility. Try ankle rotations while watching your favourite show. Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, lift your left foot, and use your big toe to make circles in the air. Try 20 rotations clockwise, then anticlockwise, before switching feet. Or try writing letters of the alphabet with each foot.

9 Stand up

While on-demand services often mean there are no advert breaks, it's important to walk around to prevent developing any muscle pain caused by sitting in the same position.

10 Talk about it

Enjoyed a show with your partner? Then discuss it, says a study published in the *Journal of Personal Relationships* – it can increase your bond.

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Snack right

While screen time and snacks are a standard combo, we can mindlessly overeat in front of the TV, leading to unwanted weight gain. Keen to limit your grazing? Eat your evening meal before you settle on the sofa and, if you do want to have a nibble, choose healthier options, such as plain popcorn, nuts and vegetable sticks. If you want a treat, choose chocolate or sweets in wrappers. The wrapper acts as a visual cue to remind you how many you've eaten, making you more mindful of your intake, plus unwrapping each one slows down the process.

