

Triumph
& Grace

THE BIG THREE

Things That Are Harming You and
You Don't Even Know It

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Coffee

We love our coffee, don't we? It's easy to understand why. When we hold that cup of warm brew in our hands, it seems so familiar and comforting each morning.

Coffee shops are everywhere, and millions drink it in some form: hot, iced, flavored, latte, espresso, small, medium, large, giant, black, with milk, with soy milk, with sugar, with honey... the options are endless.



Consumers enjoy the smell and the taste along with the ambiance of the coffee experience. It makes us feel good and part of the coffee drinking tribe around the world. This cultural aspect of coffee is reinforced in advertising, movies, and television. There is no escape from it.

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Although coffee has become integral to our lives, there is also a dark side to this habit that warrants our attention and action to safeguard our health and well-being.

While this discussion focuses on coffee, the effects of caffeine are similar for most teas, colas, cocoa, chocolate, and especially energy drinks. Even decaffeinated coffee is something we need to question.

A Bit of Background

Where it all started

Legend has it that an Ethiopian goat herder in the ninth century observed the excitable behavior of his goats after they ate the red coffee berries on a particular bush. He then ate some himself and found them to be a quick source of energy. Whether legend or not, from this place, the custom spread and morphed into the worldwide phenomenon that coffee production and distribution is today.

From Ethiopia, coffee consumption spread through the Middle East, the Mediterranean, to Europe and the Americas, and to parts of Asia. The Industrial Revolution contributed to the coffee business with innovations such as the percolator and drip coffee maker. The invention of instant coffee in the early 20th century led to the in-home convenience of coffee drinking by anyone who wished it.

Ethiopia is still considered the birthplace of coffee, and today the largest producers are Brazil, Columbia, and Mexico in Latin America, with Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda the large producers in Africa. In Asia, we have Vietnam as the second largest coffee producer worldwide. Other locations on the coffee stage are Yemen and Hawaii.

The “coffee belt” falls between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, in places with high altitude, tropical climates, regular rainfall, and distinct dry and rainy seasons. The variables for each area determine the distinct flavors that their coffee beans are known for.

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From the plant to your cup

Coffee cherries are harvested by hand as a rule, and then run through either wet (washed) or dry (natural) processing, both of which involve several chemicals for fermentation, cleaning, and drying.

Afterward, the coffee beans, now freed from the cherry exterior, are dried, milled, and roasted at high heat that further transforms the beans, and in some cases with added flavorings.

If the beans are to be decaffeinated, there are additional chemical processes applied.

After the roasting is complete, the coffee beans are cooled to prevent over-roasting, either on a cooling tray or with fans. The beans emit carbon dioxide, a byproduct of the roasting process, over the following hours or days, depending on the batch size.

From there, whole beans may be packaged as is, or the beans may be ground to varying granularity depending on the intended coffee machine.



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Ground coffee is sealed in airtight aluminum or plastic packages with one-way CO² gas valves. Some coffee is packed in pre-measured pods for the single-serve machines.

As with any commodity, the product is distributed everywhere through existing channels to local grocery stores and cafés, to online trading companies, to retailers, supermarkets, and specialty stores. Massive coffee companies like Starbucks and Nestlé have their own warehouses and distributors.

The money trail

The coffee industry is profitable across each sector of production, with the lowest profit margin for the farmers. In developing countries, the local farmer will receive a mere fraction of the end value. Global prices and demand have a downstream influence, as do weather, disease, and labor conditions. The Fair-Trade program can help increase income for the growers on high-quality beans.

Major coffee bean roasters such as Starbucks, Nestle, and Dunkin' generate billions of dollars in revenue with specialty coffee. In 2024 the global coffee market was valued at \$522 billion. That is a lot of coffee.

For retail coffee shops and cafés, coffee is a high mark-up product. The larger coffee chains, like Starbucks, Dunkin', and Tim Hortons make billions each year, with Starbucks leading the way at \$36 billion in 2024. With franchising opportunities, the retail coffee market is ever-growing as a highly rewarding business.

Let's not forget the instant coffee market. Yes, it's still around. Brands like Nescafé and Maxwell House are still large names in this arena, with Nestlé generating over \$10 billion for its instant and roasted coffees.

Add in the coffee pods and their machines, such as Keurig and Nespresso, and you witness another huge market segment.

So, what is the huge attraction of coffee? Once, a colleague of mine, who was a tea drinker, said she envied coffee drinkers because they seemed to belong to a club that only they understood.

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More than just a cup of joe

From its early discovery in the highlands of Ethiopia and its progressive spread around the world, coffee continued to attract and entice people into the habit.

As more people discovered coffee, a whole culture emerged around the ritual of downing a cup of the warm brown brew. In major European cities, notably in England and France, coffeehouses became popular meeting places. Inside these walls over coffee tables, people gathered to discuss politics, literature, and intellectual ideas.

In America, coffee chains and cafés further ingrained coffee into the national culture. Later, in the 1980s, specialty coffee entered the stage, with Starbucks in the lead. Featuring custom brews, espressos, and premium coffee beans, it became a global coffeehouse chain.



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With this phenomenon, people came to view coffee as an experience, not just a morning beverage. The coffee menu at Starbucks contains dozens and dozens of options in all kinds of flavors, ingredients, and preparation methods, including seasonal variations. Think of latte, cappuccino, macchiato, mocha, steamed milk, milk alternatives, spices, chocolate, and other syrups for layered flavors, and you get the idea.

This is a long way from a simple black coffee or coffee with milk and sugar. These are desserts in a cup. The 16-ounce frappuccino can have 550-570 calories, more than 25% of an average person's expected intake.

The modern coffee shop is still an important site to hang out and have cultural and social experiences. It's where solo entrepreneurs can spend all day at a table, working on their laptops and using free Wi-Fi. It's a place where friends can gather for a midday break, or after work. It's a place where a person can interview clients or meet prospective dates.

Coffee is not just a beverage, it's a personal experience, an indulgence, a luxury, and dare we say... a part of one's identity.



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Not What We Think It Is

Bugs and things

It must be said. Agriculture is a dirty business... things are growing outside in the dirt, and the companion insect population is part of the deal. Who hasn't pulled a bug off a piece of fruit before eating it?

Coffee attracts its own collection of bugs. During the growing, harvesting, roasting, and packaging processes, ants, weevils, and beetles, insect droppings, legs, and wings make their way into the mix. Humidity can spawn insects in storage containers.

The FDA has defined acceptable limits for insect fragments based on parts per weight of the coffee beans, and the agency assures us that this is safe.

You can decide for yourself.

Spaced out webs and brains

In the 1990s NASA conducted experiments on spiders to determine the effects of psychoactive substances, namely caffeine, marijuana, LSD, Benzedrine, and chloral hydrate. The results were astonishing. Of note, the webs built by the caffeine spiders were dramatically inept and useless.

It was an interesting observation, but we are not spiders. Yet there is a nugget of gold here.

Coffee (and all caffeine) affects blood flow to the brain, with both short-term and long-term impact. This happens because caffeine causes blood vessels to constrict and block the brain's adenosine receptors (which cause relaxation and dilation of the blood vessels).

To illustrate this, researchers in Wake Forest, North Carolina conducted MRIs on a reporter before and after she drank just one cup of coffee. They discovered that blood flow to the brain dropped over 40% as a result.

Coffee disrupts the brain's hypothalamus functions of stress regulation and overall homeostasis. Toxins in coffee cause a crisis reaction, the fight-or-flight response, along with increased heart rate and blood pressure.

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The key takeaway is that caffeine is an insecticide produced by the coffee plant to defend itself. When you drink coffee, the body recognizes it as poison and tries to expel it quickly in a high alert state.

Tossing and turning those bones

We know that sleep is essential for us to survive and to thrive. Some people stop drinking coffee after lunch or mid-afternoon, thinking that will help them sleep. Some people can drink coffee well into the evening and seem to sleep all right.

There is mixed research, but coffee stays in the body anywhere from 12 – 48 hours by most counts. And it absolutely affects your sleep.

There are two important levels of sleep: REM and deep sleep. Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is when your mind collates the day's events and consolidates memory and learning. It is key for brain development and dreaming. Deep sleep is where your body does its repair work, bolsters your immune system, restores tissues, muscles, and bones.

With caffeine in the body, these levels of sleep are impaired, and your sleep is going to be more in the light sleep category.

And speaking of bones, there is evidence tying coffee to diminished bone density and osteoporosis. This happens when caffeine interferes with calcium absorption, and the mineral ends up expelled in the urine.

I can quit any time

The toughest obstacle to reckon with is coffee addiction.

We already noted that coffee (all caffeine) blocks the brain receptors (adenosine) that allow you to feel tired when the body needs rest, and instead forces you to be awake and alert. In response, your body may create more adenosine receptors, which in turn require more coffee to keep you going. This is a physical dependency.

Equally serious is the dopamine effect. That cup of coffee lifts your mood and makes you feel good. We humans naturally seek pleasure. Rewarding the pleasure centers in the brain reinforces our habitual behavior so we can experience more of the same. This is an emotional dependency.

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Factor in the social aspects of drinking coffee with family, friends, or co-workers, and you have the tribal dependency, satisfying the desire to fit in with your peers.

Like it or not, coffee is an addiction: *a compulsive, chronic, physiological, or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms upon withdrawal or abstinence* (courtesy of merriam-webster.com).

Where Can We Go From Here?

It starts with a decision

Now what?

Are you considering changing your daily habits just a bit?

If you want to be free of coffee and all caffeine, the first thing is to decide that this is your goal and then commit to it. That is how we change anything in life.

Slow and steady wins the race

If you have been drinking coffee for a long while, especially if you drink several cups a day, the best advice is to get off it gradually. Otherwise, it is a shock to the system, and you might find it too difficult to sustain.

There will be withdrawal symptoms, so prepare yourself mentally to anticipate them and know that these are temporary. They will go away when your body is cleaned up, so stay the course and win the day.

- Headaches
- Fatigue and sleepiness
- Irritability and grouchiness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mild depression

Here are some pointers to plan for success – adapt any or all of them as you see fit:

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- Start drinking organic coffee to eliminate pesticides immediately
- Reduce your daily intake by one cup for the first week – for example if you drink 8 cups a day, go with 7 cups a day for week one
- Each week, remove another daily cup – in our example, reduce daily cups from 7 to 6 for a week, then to 5 the week after, and so on
- When you are down to one cup a day, cut that in half the following week, then in half again the week after
- Try decaffeinated coffee and stick with the Swiss Water Process
- Switch to herbal teas that are naturally caffeine free
- Drink warm water with lemon
- Get lots of sleep so your body can repair itself
- Take brisk walks to improve your lymphatic functions
- Drink plenty of water to flush out your system

Coffee isn't the only source of caffeine, so be mindful of hot chocolate, sodas, and most teas, or eating chocolate in any form. Even decaffeinated coffee contains some caffeine.

Don't be lured in by the antioxidant claims for coffee and chocolate. If you eat proper whole food, your body will have all it needs.

Pay attention to how you feel and notice the improvements in your mental and physical function. Health is its own reward.

Even the experts struggle

When researching this topic, I discovered that many "experts" who discuss how damaging coffee is to the body and the benefits of quitting, still drink it themselves in lesser amounts.

Does this make them wrong or hypocritical? I don't think so.

To me, it demonstrates in big bold letters the power of coffee addiction, that even people who have done extensive research still struggle with letting go.

That "pick me up" elevated feeling is addictive and a false promise of happiness. It is only dopamine and a short-lived pleasure.

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What worked for me, after I quit many times and failed, was to walk away and not look back. No contact ever again.

You can be free too. I believe in you.

As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live. ~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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[Kaldi, the Ethiopian Goat Herder Who Discovered Coffee | Moss and Fog](#)

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Side Profile: Starbucks

The Starbucks company, named after Moby Dick's Starbuck – the first mate of the Pequod and voice of reason against Captain Ahab – was founded over 50 years ago in Seattle, Washington.

In its early years, it sold only premium coffee beans and coffee equipment, but it underwent a shift in the early 1980s.

Howard Schultz, the new Director of Retail Operations and Marketing, traveled to Milan, Italy. There, he was taken by the city's vibrant coffee culture, where people gathered in cafés for espresso and cappuccino.

Inspired by his Italy visit, Schultz encouraged the Starbucks management to expand their stores into the coffeehouse style, where customers could enjoy brewed coffee and pastry.

With only six stores, the company needed capital investments to expand in the new direction. Enter Bill Gates, Sr. and Bill Gates, Jr., who were powerful allies in the Seattle business community.

The Gates / Schultz connection led to a \$1.5 million investment by local investors and venture capitalists that set Starbucks on its expansion trajectory in 1984, and later allowed Schultz to purchase Starbucks in 1987.

The exponential growth of Starbucks led to its current global coffeehouse brand. Now a public company, it is one of the largest and well-known coffeehouse chains in the world, with over 35,000 stores in over 80 countries.

As a cultural influence, Starbucks made Italian coffee terms familiar (grande, venti, latte, frappuccino) and pioneered the comfortable café atmosphere with free Wi-Fi.

The coffeehouse became a "third place" between work and home, where people can spend a good deal of time meeting and working, not only drinking coffee.

Baristas are highly trained coffee artisans, and seasonal drinks have become a cultural phenomenon. Of course, you can have your Pumpkin Spice Latte in October and November.

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Over time Starbucks developed a premium coffee market, and patrons are willing to pay \$3-6 for a cup.

Other innovations have included mobile payments and loyalty programs, Fair Trade coffee, and customizable drinks, not to mention food, tea, and merchandise.

Of course, the Starbucks model has been copied by others seeking to capture some of the global market share.

Bit of trivia: David Fincher, director of the 1999 movie Fight Club, ensured that there was a Starbucks cup in every scene, as a running commentary on commercialism.

He said, "We had a lot of fun using that – there are Starbucks cups everywhere, in every shot. I don't have anything personal against Starbucks. I think they're trying to do a good thing. They're just too successful."

There is no denying that Starbucks is a giant player in the coffee shop scene and has a major cultural influence. And that is not without a downside.

Like many corporate giants before it, Starbucks saturation of its market created challenges for small independent cafés to keep customers and remain profitable.

Small local coffee shops have had to adapt with personalized service, higher-quality products, and specialized offerings to differentiate themselves and maintain in a loyal customer base.

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Side Profile: Caffeine Blues - Wake Up to the Hidden Dangers of America's #1 Drug

By Stephen Cherniske, M.S. - Text below quoted from the Introduction

Caffeine Myths Debunked

In the pages of Caffeine Blues, I present the full scope of caffeine's effects on physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and debunk the following popular misconceptions about caffeine:

1. *Caffeine gives you energy.* Wrong. Caffeine does not provide energy—only chemical stimulation. The perceived “energy” comes from the body's struggle to adapt to increased blood levels of stress hormones. In most cases, this induced emergency state leads to well-defined side effects collectively known as caffeinism. Ironically, caffeinism is characterized by fatigue.
2. *Caffeine gives you a “lift.”* Wrong. Using coffee for mood enhancement is a short-term blessing and a long-term curse. While the initial adrenal stimulation may provide a transient antifatigue “lift,” caffeine's ultimate mood effect is a letdown, either subtle or profound. Advertisers and coffee “institutes” have kept this side of caffeine from public view. In Chapter 4, you'll find clear and unequivocal evidence of caffeine's role in depression and anxiety. What's more, caffeine is positively linked to panic attacks, a psychiatric disorder affecting an estimated 5 million Americans.
3. *Caffeine sharpens your mind.* Wrong. While caffeine users may feel more alert, the experience is simply one of increased sensory and motor activity (dilated pupils, increased heart rate, and higher blood pressure). The quality of thought and recall is improved no more than the quality of music is improved when played at a higher volume or speed. In Chapter 4, you will find a convincing argument, backed by clinical research, that caffeine actually decreases overall mental acuity.

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The Dark Side of Caffeine

There are plenty of people who don't want you to know the truth about caffeine. If it were just a matter of "coffee jitters," it wouldn't be such an issue. But as you will see, the effects of caffeine are far-reaching and can be quite serious. Importantly, women are at higher risk than men, and children are the most vulnerable to caffeine because of their limited ability to detoxify the drug. Caffeine stays in a child's brain and bloodstream much longer than an adult's, and subsequent doses produce a cumulative increase in stress and addiction. Is it any wonder that soft drinks, to which manufacturers add caffeine, have become the most widely consumed beverages in America? The truth is, Americans of all ages are addicted to the caffeine in soft drinks!

It's a fact that young children consume alarming amounts of caffeine, entering the cycle of dependency and nervous system dysfunction early in life. One study identified peak consumption periods at three, thirteen, and seventeen. These children are set up for a lifetime addiction with serious health consequences. In the following chapters, we'll explore caffeine's connection to hyperactivity, learning and behavior disorders, fatigue, cancer, heart disease, ulcers, headache, allergy, PMS, birth defects, and more.



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Alcohol

Many of us have lifted a glass of champagne or other beverage to celebrate a wedding. We have enjoyed wine at a cozy dinner. We have tipped our beer bottles at a family barbeque.

If you haven't, you surely know people who do. I would encourage you to read this section anyway to understand the full impact of its presence on our lives.

Drinking motifs surround us in all media: print, television, film, literature, music, etc.

Beer and wine have a long history in human experience, one that is entrenched into our psyches. This discussion will focus on them because of their rich history and cultural prominence, but all alcoholic beverages have an impact on our health and well-being.

As we will see, nothing is quite what it seems on the surface.

A Bit of Background

Where it all started

China is credited with the first known use of fermented grains, namely rice, honey, and fruits to produce alcohol, based on pottery dated from 7000 to 6600 BC.

Around 4000 BC, countries in the Middle East experimented with early wine production.

Later around 3000 to 2000 BC, the Sumerians made beer from barley using over 20 different recipes documented on clay tablets. Beer found its way into sacrificial and religious settings as an offering to the gods. The ancient Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* informs us that the wild character Enkidu became civilized after drinking seven pitchers of beer.

Egyptians made beer from barley, wheat, and yeasty dough. Medical texts credit beer as a cure for many ailments in addition to it being the drink of the gods. Laborers were paid with this "liquid bread" at a ration of three beers per day.

Around 2000 BC, the Greeks built vineyards, and Greece became an early center for wine production. They too used it as medicine, an offering to the gods, and currency.

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This later influenced Rome for the same usage, and Roman soldiers drank 2 to 3 liters of wine per day to maintain good health.

Back to China, it was the first to use yeast fermentation to distill spirits. Here as well, alcohol had both a sacred and ritual significance, including celebrations and holidays, along with a proverbial belief that alcohol was the best of all medicines.

The lineage continues with expansion and experimentation across the continents, but you get the idea. Humans have a long history with alcohol, going back to our earliest recorded times.

Agriculture and alcohol

Alcohol production, particularly beer, is closely tied to agriculture. Grains, hops, and yeast are essential ingredients in brewing, all of which depend on farming.

Barley is the most common grain, but others such as wheat, oats, corn, rice, and rye have made their way into the brewing process.

The flowers of hops contribute flavor and bitterness to beer and serve as a natural preservative.

Yeast is not a direct product of agriculture, but the process of creating it involves agricultural inputs such as sugars and starches.



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Wine, of course, depends on vineyards and specific climates to produce the desired grapes.

All of this indicates that alcohol production came about with the advent of agriculture and was not possible in the hunter-gatherer days of human history.

It wasn't for the alcohol content

Mesopotamian beer was a thick porridge-type liquid that was a food staple. When food was scarce, this carbohydrate-rich gruel provided necessary calories and protein. The Sumerians consumed beer with straws because of the residual mash and grain in the mixture.

The use of beer to nourish, sustain, and hydrate the workers indicates its value as a food source. The alcohol content itself was low compared to modern beer, with the estimate around 2-4% alcohol by volume.

The ritual importance of beer and wine was related to the symbolism of fertility, abundance, and sustenance, with reverence for the religious realm.

In addition, beer was a valuable alternative to drinking water which was regarded as contaminated and unsafe.

Enter the monasteries

The ancients understood fermentation, but the actual cause of it, namely yeast, took a while to figure out. Beer came about via spontaneous fermentation by wild yeast in the fields.

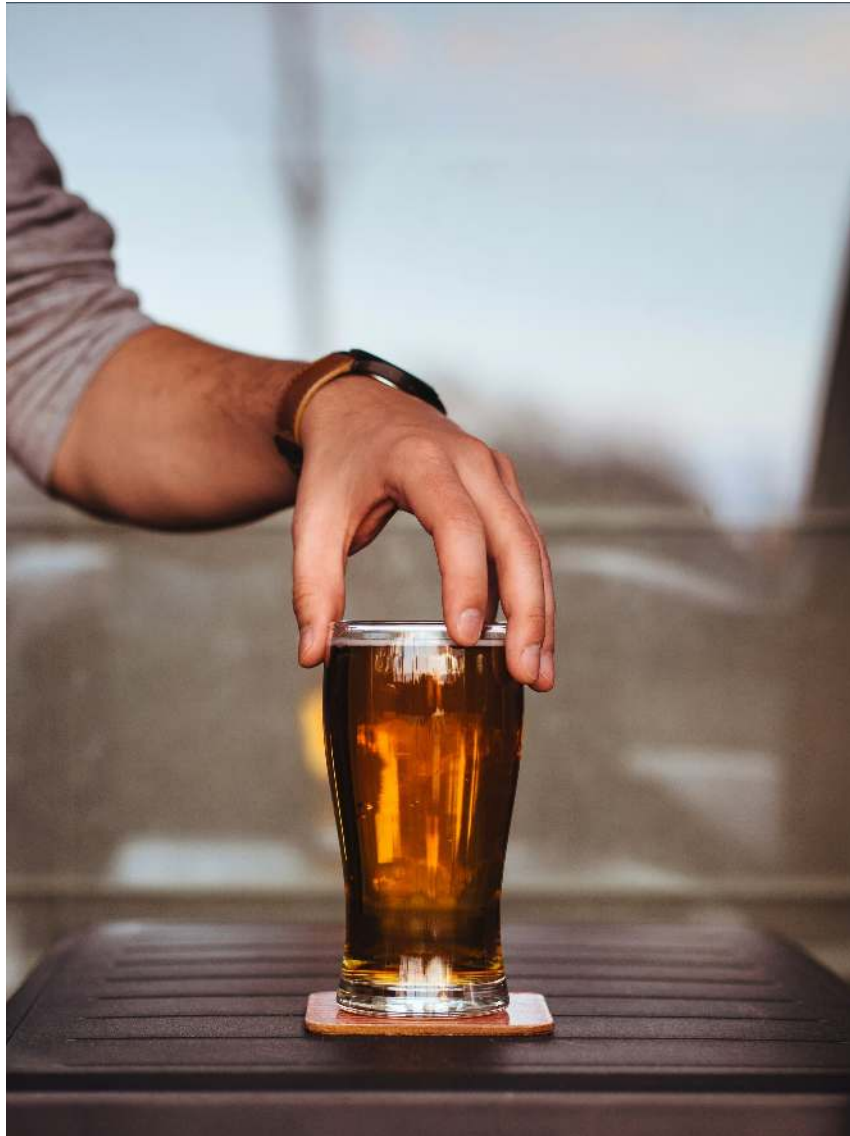
During the Middle Ages in Europe, as brewing techniques improved, people began to focus on increasing the alcohol potential of beer.

Monasteries became major players in the medieval beer brewing industry, namely through development of brewing techniques and higher alcohol content. They introduced hops to preserve and flavor the brew, adding to its bitterness and stronger flavor.

This beer checked in at 5% alcohol by volume, on a par with modern brews.

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After this innovation, drinking for intoxication became more widespread, notably for social situations and feasts.



More than just a mug of brew

With a custom so entrenched in the human dynamic, it is easy to understand why we take it for granted as part of life.

For the common person, drinking became a means of enjoyment in social gatherings, feasts, and celebrations. This shared experience fosters a sense of community, as true now as it was thousands of years ago.

The ancients believed that beer and wine made one civilized. That belief is still with us.

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It's a rite of passage to have your first "legal" drink at a certain age, meaning that your friends or relatives will take you out to get drunk, and you hope you get home safely.

This bonding over alcohol runs deep. It is much more significant than that little dopamine hit you get from the first sip. This is something tribal and vital. It is culture and heritage. It's an identity.

You get a new job – it's your birthday – you got engaged – it's the holidays – all these are triggers to have a drink and celebrate. You suffer a loss – you get fired – a loved one dies – your spouse leaves you – all these are triggers to have a drink and cope with your emotions.

That is why it is so difficult to realize the dangers. Everyone is doing it. It feels normal.

Not What We Think It Is

Agricultural influences

While water is the main ingredient in beer, the quality of the water can be compromised by pollutants such as pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, and fluoride, which can affect the final product.

The spent grain from the barley mashing for beer may end up in your food supply.

Beer is pasteurized which will kill all its vitality and potential nutrient value.

Oh my aching head... and heart... and liver

Pollutants aside, the sustained damage to your health comes when alcohol enters your bloodstream and reaches the brain, which it does quickly. The resulting slowdown in brain activity leads to:

- Faulty decision making and impaired judgment
- Slow reaction times
- Lack of coordination
- Memory lapse and difficulty concentrating

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Over time, heavy drinking leads to longer lasting damage:

- Brain shrinkage in the regions of memory, learning, and emotions
- Cognitive decline, leading to dementia
- Mood irregularity based on impact to neurotransmitters

Apart from the brain impact, habitual drinkers may experience:

- Damage to the liver when it can no longer break down alcohol
- Heart issues like high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, and heart disease
- Digestive difficulties like ulcers, acid reflux, and inflammation of the pancreas
- Damaged immune system where your body cannot fight infection or recover
- Cancer risk, namely in the mouth, throat, colon, liver, and breast

Add to the mix the damage done to family relationships and the perils of drunk drivers on the road, and you might question if drinking is such a good idea after all.



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Moderation and advertising

You have no doubt heard the expression “all things in moderation” and you might ask yourself if you would be satisfied with moderate health and well-being.

Some health advisors suggest that moderate drinking means one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men. That ends up being 30 and 60 drinks per month, respectively. Further, these guidelines do not consider personal health factors, family history, or other lifestyle choices.

The wine experts claim that red wine has antioxidants and point out the “French Paradox” (the idea that French people have a lower rate of heart disease despite high wine consumption). Eating grapes and berries can give you better antioxidants in their natural state, and there is no proof that wine contributes to heart health.

These claims stem more likely from the alcohol industry advertising and marketing efforts, and not from any unbiased scientific evidence.



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The Lancet paints a different picture

British medical journal *The Lancet* published a 2018 study on alcohol consumption and global health. Their findings paint a vastly different picture.

Their conclusion was that no amount of alcohol consumption is completely safe. They further stated that even low levels of alcohol in the body pose a higher risk of health problems, such as:

- Cancer, including breast, liver, esophageal, and colorectal
- Heart disease, including high blood pressure, arrhythmia, and heart failure
- Brain impairment, including cognitive decline, mental health issues, and dementia from cumulative damage to the brain structure and function

The Lancet study attributes 2.8 million alcohol-related deaths per year globally, not only from heavy drinking but to the cumulative effects of lighter drinking. Moderate consumption over the years can contribute to mortality from liver disease, strokes, and heart attacks.

Where Can We Go From Here?

It starts with a decision

Now what?

I hope this discussion has opened your eyes to the effects of alcohol that you may not have been aware of. You may decide to continue as you are and that is certainly your choice.

However, if you want to be free of alcohol or at least cut back, there are several suggestions below to get you started.

The first thing is to decide that this is your goal and then commit to it. That is how we change anything in life.

Next, identify your big WHY – the powerful personal reason behind your decision. Whether it's being there for your family, improving your health, preserving relationships, or maintaining your career success... choose a motivation that deeply matters to you.

This will be your impetus to get through any rough spots and withdrawal symptoms.

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Then consider how you want to approach this change in your life.

Whether you choose to gradually reduce or stop completely, keep in mind that any positive change starts with the first step forward.

Question the cultural norms

Know what your triggers are. What are those situations, emotions, and people that prompt you to drink?

Do you feel like drinking at the end of the day? On Friday night? When you're feeling stressed? When it's your birthday? When you're feeling happy? When you are mad at your spouse? When a friend comes over?

Consider why you would reach for a drink when you are feeling angry, sad, or overjoyed.

By thinking ahead, it allows you to plan alternative behaviors, such as going for a walk, writing in your journal, or calling a friend to keep you on the path you've chosen.

There will be drinking at parties, and you may face peer pressure in social settings. You may consider bringing your own beverage. I have found that people understand if you don't want to drink, so just be honest with them.

Find alternatives to manage emotions

If you have an emotional support system, it may help you. Can you confide in a family member or a friend to help keep you accountable?

A therapist or counselor could provide useful guidance.

Create a new habit to replace the one you are shedding, and make sure it's a healthy one... don't start drinking soda to replace beer. Try sparkling water with lemon for example.

You could start a new hobby, something you have wanted to try out but never got around to.

Exercise will speed up the detoxification process and boost your mood. Start with walking.

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Drink lots of water to flush your system and eat wholesome foods.

Try to avoid events where there will be alcohol, at least in the beginning.

Feed your mind with books, podcasts, and videos that inspire you.

Remember this doesn't have to happen all at once. Small steps and steady progress will win the day for you.

Love yourself and acknowledge your progress. You are doing the demanding work that will pay off in a huge way.

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world... as in being able to remake ourselves. ~ Mahatma Gandhi

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The Big Three – Things That Are Harming You and You Don't Even Know It

Side Profile: Normalization

Alcohol is deeply embedded in our culture and subtly promoted through television, film, advertisements, books, music, and other media.

Drinking can be portrayed in many different lights: as a symbol of celebration, social status, relaxation, rebellion, wealth, sophistication, success, power, and individualism.

Through drama or comedy, the impact is evident. It is everywhere once you start to notice.

Often in the background, people are seen casually drinking, bonding over a glass of something, to indicate any number of scenarios: expressing emotions, solving problems, relaxing among friends, unwinding from a long day, connecting with new people. Alcohol is presented as a normal aspect of being an adult.

High-end champagne, whiskey, and wine can inform us that the consumers are wealthy, successful, sophisticated, and glamorous.

Beer buddy movies encourage us to identify with the regular blokes who are always making bad decisions and getting into trouble in a funny way. How many wild college vacation movies can you think of, where the young adults are simply innocent and carefree? As if this were a rite of passage.

In endless types of settings, drinking is shown as the path to a good life and a good time.

I invite you to take note of this phenomenon the next time you watch a movie or adult television program. Alcohol is always a character, generally in an understated supporting role as part of normal life.

- James Bond films: Alcohol is a signal for sophistication and danger, with the James Bond martini an icon of his unrattled persona.
- The Simpsons: Homer regularly visits Moe's Tavern as an escape and to bond with others, portrayed as natural everyday behavior. Homer acknowledged in a toast to alcohol that it is "the cause of and solution to all of life's problems."

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Other examples include Game of Thrones, Will & Grace, Cheers, Bad Moms, Friends, The Hangover, American Pie, The Breakfast Club, Animal House, 21 Jump Street, Indiana Jones, The Great Gatsby, Sex and the City, The Big Lebowski, and Weekend at Bernie's.

This constant and repetitive influence shapes our perception of what is considered normal behavior, often embedding alcohol consumption into our subconscious mind as an acceptable part of our lives.

Side Profile: Prohibition

If alcohol is so bad, why is it legal? The United States attempted to address this question by banning the production, sale, and transportation of alcohol with the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which ushered in the Prohibition period (1920-1933). This ambitious social experiment proved disastrous and the 21st Amendment later repealed it.

The temperance movement, primarily led by women, advocated for Prohibition, believing that alcohol fueled domestic violence, poverty, and crime – issues that were widespread at the time. They were correct, as we see. However, people did not want to give up their drinks and found ways around the new law.

The so-called Roaring Twenties were saturated with speakeasies (illegal secret bars) and highly profitable black-market bootlegging.

One of the unintended consequences of Prohibition was the rapid rise and expansion of organized crime. After all, this new criminal underworld required organization and infrastructure. Al Capone became infamous for building a vast multi-million-dollar empire that controlled every aspect of the illegal alcohol trade, from importation and production to smuggling and distribution, alongside overseeing a vast network of speakeasies.

Capone's world was not without its own difficulties, as the different crime factions vied for supremacy in the Chicago market, including the famous St. Valentine's Day Massacre in 1929.

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Interesting side note, the same Al Capone supported a soup kitchen in Chicago that provided three meals a day to over 2000 unemployed people, and over 5000 people got a free dinner on Thanksgiving. All of this underpins a curious and mixed legacy.

Eventually, the federal government realized that Prohibition was costing it significant tax revenue, and the movement toward repeal commenced.

Prohibition teaches us some important lessons: First, alcohol addiction is a powerful force, and individuals are willing to break the law to satisfy their cravings. Second, governments cannot control personal behaviors on a large scale. Third, organized crime is not a symbol of freedom, but a lucrative and sometimes ruthless business that prevails to this day.



The Big Three – Things That Are Harming You and You Don't Even Know It

Television

Television is ubiquitous. Many homes have televisions in several rooms. When you factor in the presence of tablets and other smart devices, it is possible to watch programming anywhere and any time.

How did this all come about? And what are the darker implications of screen viewing on such a wide scale? Television is the focus of this discussion, but the concepts and principles apply to visual entertainment media in all its modern forms.

Let's explore.

A Bit of Background

Where it all started

The earliest television technology goes back to the 1800s where mechanically scanned images were transmitted onto a screen, building on the work of communications pioneers Samuel Morse and Alexander Graham Bell.

By the 1920s, independent inventors in Scotland, Germany, and the United States had built different versions of the mechanical television that sent images through wires using a rotating metal disk.

But it was the Russian and English inventors who first combined a Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) with mechanical scanning to develop a completely new type of electronic television.

A teenage American student in Utah produced a vacuum tube that could dissect images into lines, transmit those lines, and turn them back into images.

And so began the evolution in television technology.

Battle for supremacy

The broadcast method and the receivers had to be aligned. While mechanical televisions dominated the market in the early years, the superior technology of electronic television systems won the battle.

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In 1941 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) set guidelines for a single technology standard, using analog broadcast signals of varying radio waves. The major broadcasting networks (ABC, NBC, CBS), the transmission technology, and the end receivers (television sets) had to be uniform.

Much later in 2009, transmission digital broadcast signals as binary code replaced the analog model.



The demise of radio

Although televisions were available in some form in the 1920s and 1930s, supported by the corresponding broadcasting stations, by 1940 there were merely hundreds of television sets in use in the United States. Of course they were extremely expensive in their day, with the cost approaching half of an average worker's annual salary.

At this time, radio still ruled, with over 80% of the population owning one. But things changed quickly, more television stations started up, and by the end of the decade and the debut of variety shows, there were over a million television sets in use in the U.S.

The move toward television escalated with each passing year. Television became the norm, and radio quietly faded away as the nightly family ritual, along with all its imaginative and captivating programs.

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The Golden Age

The 1950s are often called the Golden Age of television. It was the post-World War II years, the population was booming, and television was a popular and affordable luxury. By 1950 there were 6 million television sets in American homes, and ten times that by 1960.

Television programming branched out from simple news reports to theater and drama, in two primary formats: magazine programs included the *Today* show and *The Tonight Show*, and television spectacular or television specials with music and variety programs.

Quiz shows, such as *\$64,000 Question*, dramatic anthologies and series, such as *Playhouse 90*, *The U.S. Steel Hour*, and *Gunsmoke*, and family shows, such as *I Love Lucy*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, took firm root in peoples' living rooms.

After the 1950s, the technology and quality of television programs continued to spiral upward.

With the mainstream expansion of cable television (originally created for rural and isolated locations) and the addition of numerous program options, television viewing became integral to the lifestyle of people around the world.

Color television broadcasting started in the mid-1960s with dramatic effect.

LCD television came along in the early 1980s.

High-definition televisions (HDTV) became available in 1998 and more affordable afterward.

Now we have streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, and Amazon Prime, which allow us to watch programming on different devices besides our televisions. The on-demand aspect of streaming frees the viewer from a fixed schedule.

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More than just entertainment

The famous Presidential debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon took place in 1960. While the camera favored the young good-looking JFK, radio listeners believed that older statesman Nixon did a better job.

It wasn't the first televised debate, however. In 1956 Eleanor Roosevelt and Margaret Chase Smith debated on behalf of Adlai Stevenson and Dwight Eisenhower, the candidates for that year's election.

Every Presidential election since has featured televised debates as part of the campaign agenda.

The JFK post-assassination coverage was broadcast full time, including the funeral and the on-camera execution of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby.

The Viet Nam War brought the horrors and brutality of war into people's living rooms each night. The 1968 Tet Offensive, with tens of thousands of deaths on all sides, signaled the last of any public support for the war effort.

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Governments and media have exploited the potential to influence public perception and opinion using television with its instant and visceral impact. Think of more recent times and the Gulf War efforts.

Through the ensuing decades, television programming continued to step into controversial topics, such as the anti-war sentiment, feminism, civil rights, career women, abortion, birth control, divorce, homosexuality, alternative families, and the cult of personality. These shows no doubt had a broad influence on societal norms, for better or worse.

On the other hand, television can deliver enormous benefits to the viewer through a myriad of educational programs, community television stations, CSPAN, theater productions, uplifting drama, and other offerings that engage the active mind.

Not What We Think It Is

Child development

Researchers, psychologists, and parents can agree that children are affected by television viewing. While it can be difficult to narrow down the specific programs, many contend that it leads to the following in children and adults to some degree:

- Cognitive decline over time, 10-20 years
- Aggression and insensitivity, especially around violence
- Decreased conversations between children and their parents
- Reduced study and homework time
- Decreased ability to concentrate, shorter attention span
- Obesity, showing the influence of commercials
- Sedentary life when children should be playing outside
- Diminished sleep, especially if the television is in the bedroom
- Addiction to television and impaired brain development
- Negative values from inappropriate television role models
- Anti-social behavior, isolation, and lack of engagement and empathy

Brain impact

The *Scientific American* reported in 2016, that via brain imaging, regular television viewing clearly affects children's neural circuits. They went on to suggest that *watching television for prolonged periods changes the anatomical structure of a child's brain and lowers verbal abilities*. They added that heredity may play a role as well and that further study is needed.

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The same publication cited a Japanese study found that excessive television lowered language-based reasoning ability, and this was confirmed with verbal IQ testing.

There are many other variables naturally, and parents can make their own observations here. While television may not damage the brain as some believe, it most certainly wastes it.

Lastly, prolonged television viewing is linked by some researchers to degenerative brain disorders such as Alzheimer's disease and other dementia.

Hypnotic effect

Our brainwave frequencies are different in our waking and sleeping states. Adult waking states include alpha (resting state, calm, easy to learn) and beta (normal waking state, alert, active decision making).

Within a few minutes of watching television, the brain goes into the alpha state, which serves as a suggestible hypnotic condition that is more suited to meditation and deep relaxation.

In the alpha frequency, your subconscious mind is open to integrating information without any filters, which would be the job of the alert beta state. Think of how this could affect your consumer desires and impulsive purchases that leave you wondering why you did it.

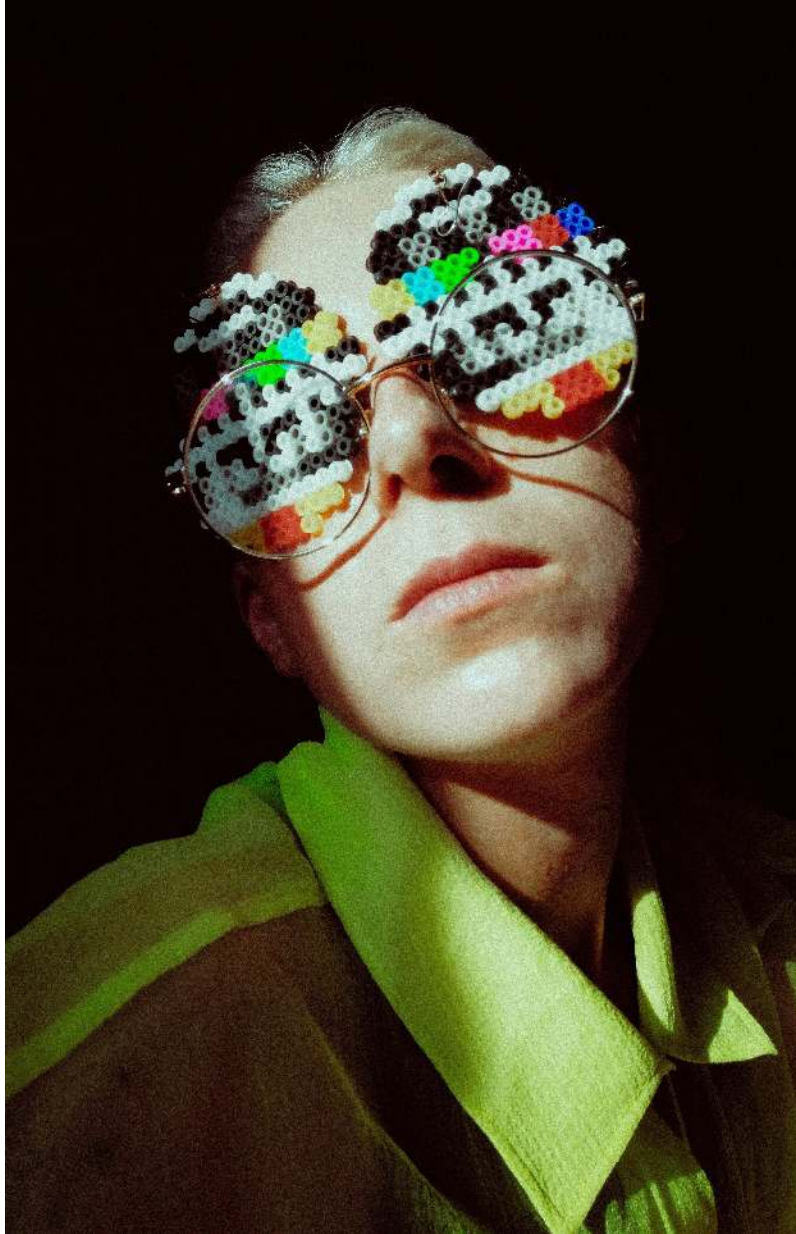
The concern here is the lack of critical thinking and analysis while you are consuming content with the non-critical brain. Your decisions are more driven by emotion than logic, which is a boon to any product marketers, who spend millions to find out what will hook its audience. Those Super Bowl ads are significant examples.

Additionally, children's brains operate at the theta level, even lower than alpha, where everything is taken directly into the subconscious mind and accepted as true.

Given the receptive brain state while we are watching television and the repetition of commercial interests, it is no wonder we have become a consumer-oriented culture.

But is there more to this technology?

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Nefarious potential

Can television be used for psychological manipulation? I think we have seen that it can... but is it?

Television viewing can keep much of our waking time diverted and distracted from the realities of our world with mind-numbing entertainment. With such a captive audience, the potential and the motivation for darker programming is a clear possibility.

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The 2024 advertising spend on television topped \$60 billion, with the big spenders including giant corporations like Proctor & Gamble, various pharmaceutical, insurance, and automotive companies. Some of the U.S. government \$1.3 billion advertising spend makes its way into television as well.

Maybe this is all to sell products, services, investments, and the like. And maybe some of this money goes toward influencing public opinion, beliefs, and behaviors without people's knowledge or critical examination.

In any case, the potential of television to manipulate minds and provoke emotional triggers is evident. Follow the money and ask questions to learn more.

Where Can We Go From Here?

Now what?

You may be thinking that you don't want to take in so much television after all. Or to allow your children so much unsupervised access. It comes down to making the decision first.

What can you do to change your habit? Here are some suggestions.

Set limits on the time spent watching television.

Be mindful of what you are taking in and adjust your viewing accordingly.

Focus on quality programs and opt for educational content where your mind can stay alert.

Don't use the television as a babysitter or to keep your children occupied when you are busy with other things.

Read more yourself and read to your children more. Encourage books as a replacement for television.

Turn off the television during meals. I remember that my father put a television in the kitchen, and it was the end of any family discussion at mealtimes. That was a big loss.

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Turn off the television when you need to focus on studies. It is a terrible distraction and ruins your focus.

Help your children understand the difference between television and real life.

Explain the purpose of television advertisements.

If you're super ready, cancel Netflix and take the television out to the curb.

Remember that you are the director of your life.

The pen that writes your life story must be held in your own hand. ~ Irene C. Kassorla



The Big Three – Things That Are Harming You and You Don't Even Know It

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The Big Three – Things That Are Harming You and You Don't Even Know It

Side Profile: Netflix

Netflix changed television forever and became the pioneer that reshaped consumer viewing habits worldwide.

Founded in 1997, Netflix built a successful subscription-based DVD rental-by-mail service, with unlimited access, no late fees, and no due dates, complete with postage-paid return envelopes. Subscribers could line up the movies they wanted to watch, and the next one would be sent out when the previous DVD was returned. Genius.

By 2001 Netflix boasted one million subscribers, although it wasn't profitable until 2006 when its subscriber base reached 6 million and it generated over \$80 million in revenue.

The major turning point came in 2007 with content streaming to televisions, computers, and tablets. Piloted in Canada, this model came to the United States in 2010. Customers no longer needed to worry about physical disks, and television content was a mouse click away.

At this same time, their early traditional rival Blockbuster filed for bankruptcy. People weren't renting DVDs any more.

In 2012 Netflix added original shows to the broadcast platform, with the current number over 3600. This provided an outlet for independent film and series producers without the overhead of major motion picture studios.

2024 saw Netflix reach 282 million subscribers in 190+ countries, with over 15000 titles across international libraries, and annual revenue exceeding \$38 billion. Add to this over 60 mobile games that are played on the platform.

Their emphasis on understanding diverse cultures and local market preferences has built Netflix into a key entertainment provider around the globe, with very few countries not on board.

Other companies, notably Disney+, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and HBO Max, have entered the market, but Netflix remains the innovative streaming giant in the arena. It remains to be seen whether this market is oversaturated or if they will all find a niche.

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The Netflix model of on-demand viewing removed the need for adhering to a broadcast schedule. People can watch what they want, when they want, streamed right into their homes, or boats, or cars, or campground, or wherever.

The platform also includes a recommendation engine, using an algorithm to tailor suggestions based on consumer viewing habits. The personalization aspect can be a tradeoff to individual choice by filtering out some content in favor of others. This might not be to everyone's liking in the end.

Netflix is not without other cultural influences.

The notion of "binge-watching" came about when Netflix released entire seasons of shows all together. This contributes to a new level of television engagement (dare we say, addiction?) that can lead to sleep deprivation and its associated effects.

The expression "Netflix and chill," suggesting that people watch Netflix with the notion of further intimate activities, was not likely endorsed or promoted by the company. It simply illustrates how much the company has become an icon.

Some viewers will watch a specific Netflix program separately but at the same time, and then remotely engage in social media discussions about the content. This is a "second screen" experience and again speaks to its effect on social interaction.

Traditional television may be on the way out as digital streaming services step in, making viewing so easy for consumers.

What role do you see for platforms like Netflix vs. traditional television over the coming decade?

Side Profile: Subliminal Advertising

The first known subliminal messaging in film was an animated short of Daffy Duck in 1943. Every 25 frames, the words "Buy Bonds" were flashed. The success of that tactic is unknown, but since that was how the government was raising money to support World War II, officials pursued this tactic, raising concerns once made public.

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Years later in 1957, market researcher James Vicary claimed that he flashed the words, “Eat Popcorn” and “Drink Coca-Cola” on movie screens for a fraction of a second, and that sales rose dramatically. No one could duplicate Vicary’s results, and he later admitted that the claim was untrue. Yet the seed of invisible manipulation was planted, and people remained fearful of something they could not perceive that might control their behavior.

Life magazine in 1958 published an article about the hidden selling techniques used in movies, i.e., images presented too quickly for the conscious mind to perceive but that registered in the unconscious mind instead. The article also discussed how this tactic could be used to garner support for social issues and even political candidates.

The public was quite concerned about possible psychological manipulation, and the FCC banned subliminal advertising in 1974, as “contrary to the public interest.” Other countries followed suit, but there remained a persistent belief that it was still going on.

Subtle psychological techniques are still on the table, not hidden in rapid frames, but open for the subconscious mind to take in, without conscious awareness.

These tactics may include:

- Strategic product placement in movies or television scenes, where this has become a sophisticated process often woven into the storyline with the characters using the products. Think of car companies with their brand as the hero cars in Iron Man.
- Logos, symbols, sounds, and jingles, and brand colors that evoke emotion. Think of the use of red and yellow for fast food promoting appetite and attention.
- Subtle visual references or hidden messages in logos. Think of Netflix’s dramatic “tu-dum.”

Throughout the late 1960s up to the 1990s, one study after another discredited the claim that subliminal advertising could work to increase sales. Into the 2000s researchers continued, finding that there could be some effects caused by subtle images but only under circumstances that already inclined the person to do the action. However, not everyone agrees with these results, and one must look at the funding for these studies for more insights.

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We cannot overlook the ethical considerations that arise from subliminal components in advertising. Furthermore, do these techniques reflect consumer culture or attempt to form it?

So, what can we make of all this? As advertising techniques evolve and fortunes are spent on them, how aware are we of the influences shaping our choices?

Keep in mind that the subconscious mind misses nothing, and the conscious mind cannot stop anything that comes in subliminally. The long-term effects are yet to be fully understood.

I invite you to consider the implications of subliminal messages in your daily lives and critically evaluate the media that you do consume.



The Big Three

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