

Modify your diet | Christin Smith Myers

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I've been off TV news for a long time. Although I grew up to the sounds of Peter Jennings helping us understand the world each evening, my husband I decided to turn off the nightly news when our daughter was old enough to pay attention. No use bombarding her (and eventually, my son) with images and stories of political unrest, terrorism, fires, tragedy, homicide and more.

It turns out turning off the news wasn't just good for the kids. It was good for us too.

According to Graham C.L. Davey, Ph.D. in Psychology Today, "The emotional content of films and television programs can affect your psychological health... by directly affecting your mood, and your mood can then affect many aspects of your thinking and behavior. If the TV program generates negative mood experiences (e.g. anxiety, sadness, anger, disgust), then these experiences will affect how you interpret events in your own life, what types of memories you recall, and how much you will worry about events in your own life."

But doesn't turning off the news mean you'll lose touch with reality? Not exactly. Happiness researcher Shawn Achor explains that "Psychologists have found that people who watch less TV are actually more accurate judges of life's risk and rewards than those who subject themselves to the tales of crime, tragedy, and death that appear night after night on the ten o'clock news. That's because these people are less likely to see sensationalized or one-sided sources of information, and thus see reality more clearly." (By the way, Achor's book, [The Happiness Advantage](#), is one of the best I've ever read.) In our house, we still check news several times a day on the iPad so we remain aware of what's happening, but we rarely watch the associated videos so we are not broadcasting negativity. And we make those news checks very brief compared to watching an entire program.

Here are my recommendations for modifying your diet:

- As you sit down to consume a TV show or movie, consider "What am I getting out of this?" If it provides you with true joy or relaxation or education, watch it. But if it doesn't check one of those boxes, turn off the TV and do something else. My productivity soared when I stopped watching TV every night.
- Beware the addictive nature of social media platforms, which are designed to provide endless content so you don't leave. You might want to set a timer or [create a policy](#) to make sure you don't get sucked in. If you get your news digitally, consider a subscription to a newspaper or magazine. The beauty of reading a hard copy is it's easier to walk away from and it's finite.
- Counteract the negative effects of what you watch or read. For example, if you listen to political podcasts, make sure you also listen to some comedy or uplifting podcasts. I suggest [Happier](#) or [Crazy Good Turns](#). Don't fall asleep to the nightly news; if you feel compelled to watch it, follow up by reading something much more positive before bed.
- Determine the impact of what you consume and make a different choice. Does following a certain friend on Facebook make you feel jealous? Unfollow her. Do another friend's posts routinely make you angry? Unfollow him too. Does checking your work email at night cause you anxiety? Stop checking outside of work. On the other hand, does reading books by a certain author uplift you? Read more. Is there a TV show that makes your whole family laugh together? Make watching it a

priority.

Each time you turn on the TV or check your phone or tablet, remind yourself you have a choice about what you consume and how much you consume. You can always make a different choice.