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ere is no denying that life he first *Star Wars* got faster, at with each passing decade ce has continued to accelere see this especially with our of entertainment.

was after 1977 that more of ertainment hours became up in technology – most y with the rise of video , whether with Atari's home es or the PacMan-era golden arcades.

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noses of ADHD increased in the 1980s alongside these products coming on to the scene – not to mention the first generation of computers entering our homes? Is it also a coincidence that many children and teens with ADHD enjoy playing video games, and that these games have become increasingly fast paced and overstimulating with time?

How we watch TV has also changed quite a bit since the first *Star Wars*.

In 1977, when people watched the evening news, they typically saw an anchor reading out loud from behind a modest desk. Today, however, your frontal lobe is bombarded with information coming at you from many angles – not only multiple cuts to

The unfolding parallel between the growth of technology in our lives and the increase of ADHD cannot be ignored, and . . . Star Wars is an inescapable data point.

journalists out in the field, but also talking heads pundits piped in from distant studios, fast-moving graphics and sound effects swooshes, and the ubiquitous running "crawl" of completely unrelated news scrolled across the bottom of the screen.

Even MTV – a thrilling new medium when it launched four years after *Star Wars* – has adjusted its programming dramatically to remain relevant. Full-length music videos are mostly a thing of the past, possibly because today's teens and young adults don't have the attention span for a three-minute song.

So what does the research on this topic show?

According to Dimitri Christakis, the director of the Centre for Child Health at Seattle Children's Hospital Research Foundation, in 1970, children started watching TV around 4 years of age. Children today begin watching at around 4 months.

Today, children aged 5 engage in 4½ hours of screen time daily, which is as much as 40 per cent of a young child's waking hours.

Christakis asserts that the more TV children watch before age 3, the more likely these children are to experience attention problems at school age and around 7 years.

But for Christakis, fast-paced and rapid sequencing appears to be the real problem for young children when it comes to the negative effects of media.

The findings from one of his studies revealed that children who viewed educational programmes and programmes that were naturally paced showed no increased risk for ADHD. In contrast, chil-

dren in the study who viewed fast-paced entertainment were 60 per cent more likely to have later attention problems, and children who viewed violent material were 100 per cent more likely to develop attention problems.

For Christakis, it's the prolonged exposure to rapid image changes during the critical period of brain development that leads to preconditioning the mind to expect higher levels of stimulation, which then leads to short-term, and possibly long-term, attention deficits. He has termed this process "the overstimulation hypothesis".

The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) is now recommending that media and screens should be avoided for infants 2 years of age and younger, and that children older than 2 years should have limited exposure to screen time.

The AAP is working from Christakis's research, and research by several others in the field whose findings have shown that fast-paced viewing can over-tax infants' and toddlers' brains.

There is no clear cause for ADHD, which makes the condition somewhat of an enigma. There is no medical test or brain scan that identifies ADHD, and there is also a degree of subjectivity and, arguably, cultural influence in determining the diagnosis.

However, certain things are known to play a role in ADHD – heredity and genetics, problems during pregnancy (such as maternal smoking or drinking), exposure to toxic substances, neurochemistry, and brain injuries, traumas, tumours and strokes.

OK, so *Star Wars* didn't cause ADHD. But it's impossible to ignore the relationship between technology and the increase in the condition's diagnosis and treatment over the past 40 years.

For those of us who remember seeing the original film in cinemas, the recent release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is not only a nostalgic experience but a bittersweet one. It harks back to our days of riding a bike all day, unsupervised, and in real time, and without a smartphone or gaming system or gadget of some sort to interfere. And that's suddenly a galaxy far, far away.

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