



TURN OFF THE MEDIA. IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH.

## Obesity and overuse of electronic media



**In the United States, children between 8- and 18-years old spend an average of 44.5 hours a week using electronic media and only 8.75 hours a week in physical activity. Children who spend too much screen time tend to be overweight.**

### SCREEN TIME: Time spent using electronic media

#### ELECTRONIC MEDIA: Video games, cell phones, TV, computers

Your child's health and wellbeing can be affected in many ways by spending too much time using electronic media. Too much media use can increase body weight and reduce:

- doing homework
- metabolic rates
- spending time with family
- reading
- physical activity
- playing with friends

Too much media use not only increases the risk of obesity but can lead to:

- cardiovascular disease
- diabetes
- joint disorders
- depression
- hypertension
- sleep problems

Obesity is a major health concern for our nation's children. A preschooler's risk of obesity increases six percent for every hour of TV watched per day. Research has shown that reducing the amount of time preschoolers watch television lowers their body weight.

### WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO?

#### Set limits

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests:

- No screen time for children age two years and under
- No more than one hour of total screen time per day for children ages 3 to 12 years

Parents can set rules and limit their child's access to electronic media. Tally the screen time and physical activities that are normal at your child's home, child care, school, and community events.

- Limit computer usage in a child's room
- Do not allow a TV in a child's room
- Do not allow media use during homework and meal times
- Promote physical activities
- Regularly eat family meals together
- Set a regular bedtime for your child
- Limit screen time for all family members
- Be a good role model for your child

#### Get out and about

All children should get at least 60 minutes of moderate or intense aerobic physical activity each day.

Exercise can:

- lower blood pressure
- increase bone strength
- improve mood
- reduce depression
- lessen stress
- reduce weight





**Q.**

**Each day my two-year-old spends two to three hours watching educational TV programs and playing educational computer games. Isn't this okay since she is learning from them?**

Not according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). AAP recommends that children age two and under not use any media. Find ways to make other activities available to your daughter, such as attending story time at the library, reading books together, playing outside, dancing to music, or coloring.

**A.**

**Q.**

**My four-year-old son's daycare provider has the TV on all day long. She says it's just background noise and that the kids want to watch TV when they come in the morning and are tired. After having been with this provider, my son knows all of the characters' names and theme songs from the most popular cartoons, TV shows, and movies. I think he watches too much TV. How do I address this with our provider?**

Good for you for being aware of the environment that your child is in and how it is affecting him. Share your concerns with the provider and how much and what kinds of media you want your child exposed to while in her care. Share the AAP recommendations. Suggest other activities such as free play, dramatic play, physical activities, quiet time, arts and crafts, and story time. Ask your provider how you can work together toward a solution. If she is unwilling to make changes, it may be in your child's best interest to find a new provider.

**A.**



**Q.**

**My 13-year-old gets 90 minutes of intense physical activity at least five days per week playing soccer. Every day she sends many text messages, spends a couple of hours on social networking sites, and often times plays video games. My husband says that as long as she is getting enough physical activity, she should be allowed to spend this amount of time using media. What should we do?**

Your daughter's physical activity is good, but she needs to balance more than physical activity against screen time. The balance needs to include grades, homework time, sleep, chores, family time, etc. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that teens be limited to two hours of screen time per day. That includes online social networking, video games, cell phone texting, TV, DVDs, etc. Discuss your concerns with your daughter and design a plan with her that helps her keep a healthy balance. Teens who spend too much time using media are at risk for sleep, mood, stress, weight, and school problems.

**A.**

Prepared by Kimberly Greder, associate professor and extension family life program specialist, and Diana Baltimore, doctoral student, human development and family studies, Iowa State University. Financial support for the production of this series received from Iowa Psychological Foundation, Riverbend Psychological Association, and Helen LeBaron Hilton Grant, College of Human Sciences, Iowa State University.

... and justice for all  
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Cathann A. Kress, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa. PM 3002A December 2010