

Reducing Screen Time for Children

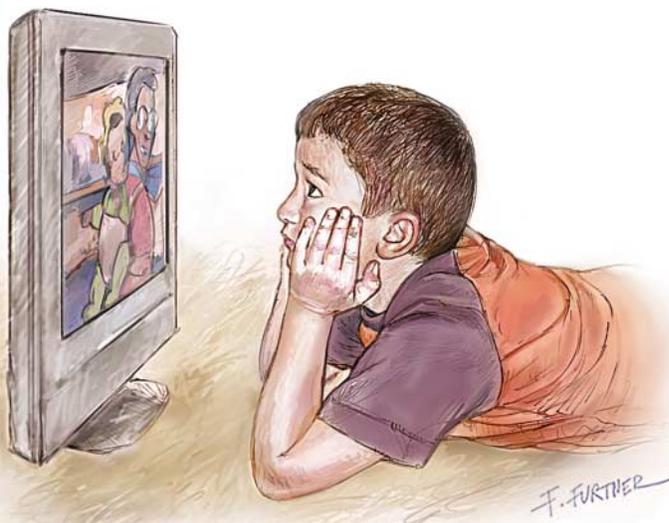
Children in the United States watch an average of 4 hours of television per day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children younger than 2 years of age avoid all types of television viewing and that children 2 years of age or older should not be exposed to more than 2 hours per day of entertainment media or “screen time” (ie, time sitting in front of a television or computer screen or playing video games). These restrictions are given for several reasons:

- Sitting in front of a television or computer screen is a sedentary behavior, meaning it does not involve much movement or energy.
- Increased sedentary behavior contributes to excess weight gain or obesity.
- Increased exposure to television or computers may influence a child’s health-related behaviors, such as eating junk food, having positive attitudes about alcohol or tobacco use, delaying language development, and developing aggressive behavior.

Because increased screen time is associated with health problems, many doctors and researchers are interested in ways to help parents reduce screen time for their children. An article in this month’s issue of the *Archives* examined 13 past research studies that tested programs to reduce screen time. Programs that worked with schools or families to reduce screen time among younger preschool children also helped those children maintain a healthy weight. In conclusion, limiting screen time for children at these early ages is very important because it helps to keep them healthy, to prevent obesity, and to set up good habits as they get older.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO REDUCE SCREEN TIME

- Set clear rules at home about how much screen time is allowed and what kinds of screen time are allowed. Use a kitchen timer to help limit the screen time.
- Follow through on these rules and provide consequences if the rules are broken.
- Encourage your child to be active during screen time; for example, have your child do yoga or stretching exercises while watching television.
- Do not allow your child to have a television in his or her bedroom.
- Encourage your child to participate in a variety of activities other than sitting in front of a television or computer screen or playing video games. Examples include playing outside (eg, riding bikes, playing tag, and throwing or kicking balls), reading books, playing board games, playing pretend, helping around the house (even young children enjoy helping a parent around the house with chores or cooking), and



participating in group or community activities (eg, sports, clubs, dance classes, music lessons, community center activities, and church activities are all great ways to get your child involved and active).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

US Department of Health and Human Services; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time/tips-to-reduce-screen-time.htm>.

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Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

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