



# Screen free Screen time's effects on kids

Watching television, playing video games, and spending time on the computer—it's known as "screen time"—can contribute to unhealthy lifestyles and a lifetime of health problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and Kaiser Permanente recommend children under the age of 2 have no screen time. Over age 2, the recommendation is not more than one to two hours per day.

## School

Kids who watch more than 10 hours of television per week do more poorly in school and have lower reading scores than kids who watch little or no TV.

### Did you know:

- By the time American kids graduate high school, they have spent nearly twice as much time in front of a TV set as they have in a classroom.
- Only 34 percent of children ages 4 to 6 in heavy TV-use homes can read, compared with 56 percent in homes that watch less TV.
- The growth of TV watching in the United States corresponds with a decline in reasoning skills, advanced-writing skills, and verbal SAT scores.

## Overweight/obesity

Children who watch too much television often weigh more and are less fit than kids who do not watch a lot of TV. When they're sitting around, they're not getting the physical activity they need to be healthy.

And they eat more junk food. There are more than 200 junk-food commercials shown during an average four hours of Saturday morning cartoons, and studies prove even brief exposure to food advertising influences the food choices of very young (2 to 6 years old) children and their families. In fact, one study showed that babies as young as 12 months respond to TV advertising.

### Did you know:

- Watching TV burns approximately two calories per minute—the same as sleeping.
- Each hour of additional TV time corresponds to a two-to-six-percent increase in a child's likelihood of being overweight or obese.
- A Harvard School of Public Health study found watching TV for an extra two hours a day increased the rate of obesity by 25 percent and diabetes by 14 percent in its research participants.
- Reducing TV time has been shown to reduce body weight—even when people didn't increase their physical activity or eat a more healthful diet.

## Behavior and attention

Research reveals that a child's environment strongly influences brain development during the first few years of life. Too much screen time deprives a toddler of necessary stimulation, and certain areas of the brain may not develop as fully as they could.

### Did you know:

- Watching TV is associated with increased aggression, lower tolerance levels, and decreased attention span.
- Many parents of children diagnosed with ADHD found their difficult behaviors and symptoms improved after they turned off their TV sets.

### Other effects

- Too much screen time also has been linked to early sexualization and a greater likelihood of using tobacco or alcohol.

### Tips

Being TV-free helps babies, toddlers, and preschoolers develop healthfully and on target. They need time to interact with other humans, experimenting with sounds and talking to and receiving feedback from others. Youngsters also need time for creative play, listening to and telling stories, and exploring their physical world.

Remember, it is much easier to start out with little or no TV in your household than to change gears

with older children. It takes a little creativity and a lot of patience, but the rewards are great!

- Turn off your TV and get the whole family to do something fun—read a book, draw, ride bikes, go to a park, wash the car together.
- Take TV sets out of kids' bedrooms.
- Be a good role model, and let your kids see you doing and being interested in other activities.
- Avoid using TV as a reward or punishment—doing so gives it too much value.
- Participate in moderate physical activity every day.
- Plan ahead. When is it most difficult for your family to avoid TV? Have alternate ideas and activities ready.
- Keep healthy snacks around the house, such as vegetables washed and cut into serving sizes, fresh fruit, or air-popped popcorn.
- Reduce your consumption of sodas and juice drinks.
- Keep track of TV, computer, and other nonactive time each week. Make it a fun game within your family to see who has the lowest total—or challenge each other to try to decrease your totals over time.

For more information about decreasing TV in your life, check out [tvturnoff.org](http://tvturnoff.org). Kaiser Permanente is a proud sponsor of national TV-Turnoff Week.