

# For health, limit kids' TV, other 'screen time'

**Last year when our children were home from school during Christmas break, they spent a lot of time watching TV, playing video games or on the computer. We know this isn't ideal, but how much of a problem is it?**

Well, it's enough of a problem to concern the American Academy of Pediatrics. It suggests limiting television viewing for everyone in the family over age 2 to one to two hours a day. Children younger than 2 shouldn't be in front of the screen at all — electronic media simply has no meaning for such young children, and their developing brains need practice in thinking creatively, problem-solving, and developing reasoning and motor skills, and that happens through unstructured play and through interaction with others.

To be honest, it's likely that most of us could benefit from more interaction with people and less with electronic playthings. Take this into consideration: By the time our children reach the age of 18, they will have witnessed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence on TV, video games, movies and hand-held screens. Such exposure can be ingrained in vulnerable children who may imitate the violence they see, or at least draw the conclusion that violence is a normal way to solve conflicts.

In addition, the academy has linked too much screen time with a greater risk of obesity. Not only does more screen time equate to being less physically active, the commercials



that kids are exposed to on television influence their food choices toward more high-fat, high-carbohydrate items that lead to higher body fat. In fact, in a study printed in the July 2011 issue of *Pediatrics*, children who watched more than 21 hours of television a week had a significantly greater body mass index than those who watched less TV.

According to research done by the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, kids aged 8 to 18 years spend about 7.5 hours a day in front of a screen, with the majority (about 4.5 hours) watching TV and the rest split between computers and video games. Only about one-third of parents establish rules limiting screen time, but when they do, the foundation found that children's screen time is nearly three hours less per day.

As parents, you need to take an active role in limiting your kids' time in front of the screen. Take any TVs, computers and video games from the bedroom and make sure kids use them out in the open, where you can see them. Set a good example by limiting your own screen time. And use the tools that are available to you — many new TVs have "V-chips" ("v" is for violence) that allow you to block shows that are rated as inappropriate for children.

For more Tips to Reduce Screen Time from the Department of Health and Human Services, go to <http://1.usa.gov/screentime>.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Kara Newby, program coordinator in Human Development and Family Sciences for Ohio State University Extension.

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