



Too Much Media

Parent - Family Newsletter



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Always On: Media and Its Effect on Children's Health

To say that we live in a culture that is "always on" is an understatement.

The average young person spends six hours and 21 minutes in front of media each day, sometimes several media at a time, according to a 2010 survey by



the Kaiser Family Foundation. That's the equivalent of a full-time job spent in front of media each week. For kids with TVs in their rooms, media consumption is even higher—over 11 hours in one day.

By far, the most popular media choice among young people is watching TV, followed by listening to music, using a computer and playing video games.

According to Dr. Victor Strasburger, a professor of pediatrics at the University of New Mexico, children and adolescents spend more time with media than they do in any other leisure time activity other than sleeping. And that's a problem.



How to Combat Too Much Media

Too much screen time has been linked to an increased risk for childhood obesity. Experts suspect that's because more time in front of media means less time for healthy activities like exercise and sleep—both of which are important for maintaining a healthy weight. Another culprit, says Dr. Strasburger, is food marketing, which is abundant in TV ads, movies and even on the Internet.

Meanwhile, other studies have linked excessive screen time to poorer

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How to Combat Too Much Media

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academic performance and even learning disorders like attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Excessive media consumption can also have a negative impact on a child's beliefs about violence, drug and alcohol use, and sex, which, over time, can lead to risky behaviors.

Whether we like it or not, today's media are powerful teaching tools. So how do we make sure they don't teach our children the wrong thing? Follow these three simple tips:

3 Ways to Minimize Media's Harmful Health Effects

1. Limit media use: Remove TVs, video game consoles and computers from your kids' rooms. Turn off the family TV when you're not actively watching a program (when you're eating dinner, for example). When you do choose to watch, make sure it's a program you

and your family actually want to watch, not just because it's something to do. The same rules go for Internet use and video games. Come up with other activity ideas, such as playing games, going for a walk or just talking.

2. Monitor media use: Experts agree that computers with Internet access should be kept in a "public" place in the home (not your teenager's bedroom) so that you can monitor activity.

Additionally, set guidelines for TV and movie viewing. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rates TV shows for their age appropriateness; pay attention to these ratings. If it's something you're unsure of, make sure you watch with your child and reserve the right to change the channel or turn the movie off if you find the content to be inappropriate. The site KidsinMind.com reviews movies in terms of how appropriate they are for children, giving each a

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“Children and teens see between 4,400 and 7,600 ads for junk food and fast food on television each year.” – Dr. Victor Strasburger

score for profanity, sex and nudity, and gore and violence.

3. Talk about media: Studies show that discussing topics seen on TV, in movies, on video games or on the Internet can go a long way in curbing risky behaviors associated with media consumption.

“Parental efforts to interpret, elaborate, and provide supplemental information on topics introduced by television have been found to be successful in countering negative or harmful content,” explains a 2010 article on the health effects of media on children and adolescents, co-written by Dr. Strasburger.

For example, the article explains, “In a recent study on exposure to sexual media content, adolescents who report that they discuss the content of what they see on television are less likely to engage in risky sexual activity.”



How Much Screen Time Is Too Much?
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends limiting screen time to less than two hours per day for children over 2; for children under 2, the AAP recommends no screen time. This includes TV, movies, Internet use and video games.