

# Ways To Reduce Screen Time

## What are the concerns?

Each day, children spend an average of 4.5 hours in front of a screen. Besides sleeping, children spend more time watching television and playing videogames than they do in any other activity. Spending so much time in front of a screen takes children away from other important activities, such as exercising and being physically active, reading and completing homework, playing and socializing with friends, and spending quality time with family.

## What is screen time?

Screen time refers to any time spent using screen media (televisions, computers, videogames, and handheld devices), excluding time used for school work. It has been recommended that children two years and older limit their screen time to no more than two hours per day.

## Why is it important to reduce screen time?

Spending too much time in front of a screen may increase children's risk of becoming overweight and developing a poor body image. Excessive screen time might also place children at heightened risk for aggressive behavior, substance use, sexual activity, and poor academic performance, particularly in the area of reading. When children spend less time in front of a screen, they have more opportunity to engage in healthier activities.

## How can parents reduce their children's screen time?

- Track how much time your children spend in front of screens throughout the day. This will give you a sense of whether you need to change their screen time habits and also allow you to track your progress.
- Establish a house rule limiting screen time to no more than two hours a day. When children follow this rule, praise (and occasionally reward) them, which will increase the likelihood that they continue to limit their screen time.
- Plan what you watch by creating a family television schedule each week and post it on the refrigerator so that everyone can see it.
- Set a good example by limiting your own screen time to no more than two hours. When your children see you following the house rule, they will be more likely to do the same.
- Remove screens from bedrooms. Children with televisions in their rooms spend substantially more time watching television and are also more likely to be overweight. So, take all screens out of your children's bedroom. Your children may protest, but remember that it's for their health!
- Turn off the television during meal times. Meal time is a great opportunity for family time, and having regular family meals has been linked to a number of positive outcomes in children. However, when the television is on, the quality of time spent together is likely limited.
- Do not use screens as babysitters. Provide your children with opportunities to play, learn, and help around the house. Instead of spending time in front of a screen, encourage them to read a book, go outside to play with friends, or involve them in whatever you are doing. For instance, if you are folding laundry, let your children help by matching the socks.



## Tips to Remember:

- Turn off the television during mealtime.
- Do not allow your child to watch television while completing homework.
- Allow your child to choose an appropriate program to watch each day. Do not turn on the television until their show comes on.
- Declare a "screen-free" day once a week, during which no one watches television, uses the computer, or plays videogames.
- Avoid using screen time as a reward. Doing so could give too much value to screen time.
- Replace Saturday morning cartoons with a fun family activity.

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