

TV Time for Young Children (Birth to 5 Years)



What is the concern?

Over 90% of children begin watching TV regularly before the age of two and 30% of preschoolers have TVs in their bedrooms. Many parents believe that watching educational programs will make their young children smarter. However, too much TV viewing in very young children has been linked to overweight and obesity, as well as problems with language development, attention span, and academic achievement. The more children watch TV, the greater the negative effects they experience.

How much TV should my child watch?

Children under the age of two should not watch any TV or videos, even programs specially advertised for very young children. Babies and toddlers learn by being active and exploring their environment. Watching TV, on the other hand, is a passive activity that does not help young children grow and learn.

From ages two to five years, children should watch less than 1 or 2 hours of TV a day. The shows they watch should be age-appropriate, educational and non-violent. Moreover, when children watch educational shows, they may be more likely to learn when parents watch with them, review ideas, and ask questions about the program.

How can I reduce the amount of TV my young child watches?

As a parent, you have the power to limit how much TV your child watches and what shows he watches. Here are some tips for doing so:

- Set clear limits for how much time your child can spend watching TV each day.
- Use a clock or stopwatch to keep track of the amount of time your child spends watching TV. This will help you learn how much TV your child actually watches and track your progress when you begin to reduce TV time.
- Set a kitchen timer to go off and make noise when the time limit is up. A timer provides children with a visual reminder of how much time is left, and the noise it makes offers an additional cue that TV time is over.
- Reducing TV time may cause your child may become angry at first. Staying firm and not giving in is the best way to help your child accept the new rules for TV time.
- Help your child make a list of fun activities to do when the TV is off. Include physical activities (tummy time, climbing, riding wheel toys), as well as quieter activities (reading, drawing, puzzles, playing dress-up). Be sure to include activities that your child can do alone and some that you can do together.

- Don't use the TV as a distraction or baby-sitter. If you are busy around the house, involve your child by assigning her small tasks (sorting socks, dusting non-breakable items, setting the table). You can also encourage your child to choose an activity that he can safely do alone.
- Turn the TV off at meal time and at least 30 minutes before your child's bedtime. This will help you connect with your child during special times of the day. It can also help your child listen to her bodily cues.
- Do not keep the TV on all the time. Some adults use the TV as background noise as they go about their day. However, this sets a bad example for children and increases their risk for exposure to mature new stories, violent shows, and unnecessary advertisements.
- Remove TVs from your child's bedroom. Watching TV interferes with sleep and contributes to obesity.
- Watch TV with your child. This will help you monitor the shows that your child watches as well as the total time spent watching TV. In choosing programs, be aware that some cartoon shows are not appropriate for children of any age.
- Do not use TV as a reward or punishment. This gives TV too much value.

Tips to Remember

- Children under 2 years of age should not watch any TV or videos.
- Children ages 2 to 5 years should watch less than 1 to 2 hours of TV each day.
- Monitor how much TV your child watches and decide whether you should work to reduce his TV time.
- Make sure that the programs your child watches are educational and non-violent.
- Remove TVs from children's bedrooms.
- Be sure your child enjoys a variety of activities each day besides TV.
- Instead of TV, let your child help you with household activities.
- If these suggestions do not work, please talk with your pediatrician for more

References

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. Children, adolescents, and television. *Pediatrics*. 2001;107:423-426.
2. Boyse K. University of Michigan Health Systems. A guide to managing television: Tips for your family. Available at <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/managetv.htm>. Retrieved November 23, 2010.
3. Christakis, DA. The effects of infant media usage: What do we know and what should we learn? *Acta Paediatrica*. 2009; 98: 8-16.
4. Pagani LS, Fitzpatrick C, Barnett TA, Dubow E. Prospective associations between early childhood television exposure and academic, psychosocial, and physical well-being by middle childhood. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*. 2010; 164:425-431.