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Watch What Your Kids Eat & Be Aware of What They Watch

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How much and what your kids eat has a big impact on their health; and so does how much TV they watch. Most kids plug into the world of television long before they enter school, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

You may have heard that childhood obesity has become an epidemic in the U.S. One in 10 children is obese and 1 in 5 is overweight. Researchers have concluded that one of the reasons for childhood weight gain is that children are spending more time in front of screens. They are watching more TV, playing video games, or on the Internet, which means less exercise. While watching TV, kids are inactive and tend to snack more. They're also exposed to ads that encourage them to eat unhealthy foods such as potato chips, sweetened cereals, and sugar sweetened drinks that become the preferred snack foods.

Statistics from Kaiser Family Foundation:

- 2 out of 3 infants and toddlers watch a screen an average of 2 hours a day.
- Kids under age 6 watch an average of 2 hours a day (TV, DVDs, videos).
- Kids and teens, ages 8 to 18, spend nearly 4 hours a day in front of a TV screen and 2 additional hours on the computer (outside of schoolwork) playing video games.

Cutting back on "screen time" allows families more time to play outdoors, take a walk, play a sport, or play with friends. We know from the research that children are influenced by what their parents do and it's important for parents to be a good role model.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of 2 should not watch any TV. Older children should be limited to no more than 1 to 2 hours per day. Television in moderation can be a good thing. For example, preschoolers can learn the alphabet on public television, grade schoolers can learn about wildlife on nature shows, and parents can keep up with current events on the evening news. Maintaining a balanced diet and establishing healthy TV habits are two of the most important things you can do for your family.

Tips for Reducing the Amount of "Screen Time":

- Work together to keep a time chart of your child's activities, including TV, homework, and playing with friends. Then discuss what you believe to be a balanced set of activities.
- Set a weekly viewing limit. Know what your kids are watching on TV and doing on the computer.



- Rule out TV at certain times, such as no TV during meals.
- Keep TVs/computers out of bedrooms.
- No TV while doing homework.
- Make a list of alternative activities such as riding a bicycle, taking a walk, working on a hobby. Before watching TV, your child must choose and do something from the list.
- Avoid using the TV/computer as a babysitter.
- Instead of watching TV play a board game, play outside, work on a craft/hobby, or dance to music.
- Be a good role model by gaining control of your own screen time.

Let's Talk:

Expect that children will not be happy with limitations on screen time. Be prepared to explain why you are limiting their time. "Healthy bodies and minds need a variety of activities. Too much time watching TV or playing on the computer doesn't give your body a chance to move or your mind to be creative." Have a list of alternative activities children can choose from. Make sure they know you will be reducing your screen time also. Be a good role model by using your new found time being more active and spending time with them.



Activity for Health:

Hang this chart near the television, by the computer or on the refrigerator to keep track each family member's screen time.

We Can! Reduce Children's Screen Time Chart (example)

	TV	Video Games	DVD	Computer/Internet	Time (hours)
Monday	2 hours	1 hour		1 hour	4 hours
Tuesday	3 hours	1 1/2 hours		1 hour	5 1/2 hours
					Total: 9 1/2 hrs

We Can! Reduce Children's Screen Time Chart

Name: _____

	TV	Video Games	DVD	Computer/Internet	Time (hours)
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					
					Total:

*Adapted from We Can! National Institutes of Health