

Turn Off TV and Tune into Health

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Overweight and obesity among all ages have dramatically increased over the past 30 years. We know that children and adolescents are two of the most vulnerable ages for weight increases. Health and self esteem issues are compounded for overweight children. In addition to the teasing and discrimination some overweight children experience, pediatric overweight can lead to type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep disorders, abnormal cholesterol levels and many other health problems. Overweight children often stay overweight and often become obese as adults. Reducing overweight among children is a national priority.

There are two major keys to good health – physical activity and diet. Watching less TV can help with both of these. There is no waking activity that we do that burns fewer calories than watching television or videos. A body parked in front of the “tube” is a body at rest. Studies show that families who watch television during mealtimes consume more processed meats, salt, soda and quick-preparation foods and fewer fruits and vegetables than those families who do not watch TV with meals.

Did you know that . . .

- On average, children in the United States spent more time in front of the television (1,023 hours) than in school (900 hours) during 2002?
- Approximately 40% of Americans frequently watch television during dinner?
- Children spend an average of 5½ hours a day using media (TV, videos, video games and computers) and the trend is likely to continue?
- One-third of children have television sets in their bedrooms?
- A typical child sees about 40,000 TV ads a year and many are for candy, sugary cereal and fast food?

During the week of April 23 – 29, 2007, millions of young people and adults around the world will turn off their televisions and take a seven day break from TV as they participate in the Turn Off TV Celebration.

Pediatricians, child development experts and media researchers have theorized that watching TV may contribute to childhood overweight in more than one way. They summarized their findings in a 2004 publication for the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The report, *The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity*, revealed that:

- Watching TV reduces the time spent in physical activity (playing).
- The food ads and popular TV characters encourage children to buy and eat more high-fat and/or high-sugar foods.
- Children snack excessively and eat less healthy meals while watching TV, playing computer games, etc.
- Watching TV and videos lowers children’s metabolic rates below what they would normally be even if they were sleeping.

The American Association of Pediatricians recommends:

- Children, age two and older watch no more than two hours of television daily
- No televisions in children’s bedrooms

Children are influenced by what their parents do, so it is important that whatever effort you make to exercise more, eat better or watch less TV is done as a family. So what can you do if you are not watching TV? Play music and dance; go for a walk; visit a park or playground; and/or involve everyone in chores, like sweeping, raking, vacuuming or picking up toys. How about planting a vegetable or flower garden?

Television cuts into family time and can affect a child’s ability to read and succeed in school. It also contributes to unhealthy lifestyles and overweight. Turning off the TV is a great way to improve your health and that of your family. Join in the Turn Off TV Celebration and turn on a healthier lifestyle for you and your children.

Sources:

Kids, Food and Electronic Media, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2004

Snack Smart, Move More Campaign, Food and Nutrition Interagency Committee, 2004

Do More, Watch Less, California Obesity Prevention Initiative, University of California Berkeley, 2006

The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004

Center for Screen Time Awareness, <http://www.tvturnoff.org/index.htm>