

## Children and TV: Limiting your child's screen time

Children and TV often go hand in hand. Understand the effects of too much screen time — and how to enforce reasonable limits.

By Mayo Clinic staff

Are you concerned about how much time your child spends watching TV or playing video games? Although some screen time can be educational, it's easy to go overboard. Consider this guide to children and TV, including how to limit your child's screen time.

Children and TV — the effects

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting a child's use of TV, movies, video and computer games to no more than one or two hours a day. Too much screen time has been linked to:

- **Obesity.** Children who watch more than two hours of TV a day are more likely to be overweight.
- **Irregular sleep.** The more TV children watch, the more likely they are to resist going to bed and to have trouble falling asleep.
- **Behavioral problems.** Children who watch excessive amounts of TV are more likely to bully, have attention problems, and show signs of depression or anxiety than children who don't.
- **Impaired academic performance.** Elementary students who have TVs in their bedrooms tend to perform worse on tests than those who don't.
- **Less time for play.** Excessive screen time leaves less time for active, creative play.

## How to limit screen time

Your child's total daily screen time may be greater than you realize. Start monitoring it. In the meantime, you can take simple steps to reduce the amount of time your child spends watching TV, movies and videos or playing video or computer games:

- **Eliminate background TV.** If the TV is turned on — even if it's just in the background — it's likely to draw your child's attention. If you're not actively watching a show, turn off the TV.
- **Keep TVs and computers out of the bedroom.** Children who have TVs in their bedrooms watch more TV and videos than children who don't. Monitor your child's screen time and the Web sites he or she is visiting by keeping computers in a common area in your house.
- **Don't eat in front of the TV.** Allowing your child to eat or snack in front of the TV increases his or her screen time. The habit also encourages mindless munching, which can lead to weight gain.
- **Set school day rules.** Most children have limited free time during the school week. Don't let your child spend all of it in front of a screen.
- **Suggest other activities.** Rather than relying on screen time for entertainment, help your child find other things to do. Consider classic activities, such as reading, playing a sport or trying a new board game.
- **Set a good example.** Be a good role model. Limit your own screen time.

Become an active participant

When your child has screen time, make it as engaging as possible:

- **Plan what your child watches.** Instead of flipping through channels, seek quality videos or use a program guide to select appropriate shows. Pay attention to TV Parental Guidelines — a system that rates programs based on suitability for children. When the program ends, turn off the TV.
- **Watch with your child.** Whenever possible, watch programs together — and talk about what you see.
- **Choose video games that encourage physical activity.** Better yet, make the games a family experience.

It may be difficult to start limiting your child's screen time, especially if your child already has a TV in his or her bedroom or your family eats dinner in front of the TV. But by creating new household rules and steadily making small changes in your child's routine, you can make a difference.