



Bright Paper

Setting Limits on Screen Time

How much time do your kids spend in front of the TV or computer screen each day?

On average, children and adolescents log nearly three hours of TV-watching daily—and that doesn't include time spent viewing videotapes, playing video games or using the computer.

What's the big deal?

Children who don't get enough physical activity are at increased risk for becoming overweight or obese. Spending hours watching TV and surfing the Internet crowds out time for physical activity.

Experts recommend that children total at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity most days of the week but, ideally, every day. They can accumulate this total throughout the day in chunks of 10 minutes or more. Activities may include sports, active play such as biking or jumping rope and household chores such as vacuuming and sweeping.

If you're raising a crop of couch potatoes (or mouse potatoes!), try these tips to set some limits on screen time and get them moving:

- Set a screen time budget. Allot kids one to two hours per day to spend on TV, video games or fun time on the computer—their choice!
- Devise an after-school action plan. Watching TV is the #1 after-school activity for many kids. Sometimes they just need ideas for what else they can do. Brainstorm with your kids to create a "Top 10" list of activities to get them on their feet after school. Activities can include active play such as riding bikes or shooting baskets, walking the dog, doing household tasks or even helping to prepare dinner. Post the list right on the fridge so kids can pick an activity when they get home from school.
- Get them moving in front of the tube. Set up an exercise bike in the TV room and require kids to put in some "pedal" time while they watch TV. Or suggest they jog in place or do some stretches during commercials. Buy or rent a fun exercise video such as aerobic dance, tae kwon do or yoga—and do it with them.
- Tune out at meal times. Turning off the TV during family meals helps you and your kids tune into what's going on in each other's lives. In addition, you're more likely to focus on how much you're eating and enjoy your food more.
- Turn the tables—on yourself. The best way to cure your kids of being couch potatoes is to cut back your own screen time and make family fitness first on your list. You'll be amazed at how much extra time you "find" when you click off the tube.

