



GIVE THE SCREEN A REST. ACTIVE PLAY IS BEST.

FACT SHEET

What is screen time.

- > Screen time refers to the amount of time spent watching TV including videos and DVD's; playing computer games on video consoles or on computers and using computers for other purposes¹
- > In some instances screen time also refers to using telephones for texting and social networking.
- > Electronic Media (EM) is a term also used to encapsulate all forms of screen based activities.

Why Reducing Screen time as a theme?

Positive associations between TV viewing and levels of overweight and obesity have been shown in the literature^{2,3}. TV viewing may contribute to overweight and obesity through electronic media displacing other activities such as free play and structured physical activity⁴, increased snacking⁵ or increased demand for energy dense foods which are heavily advertised⁶.

In a study of preschoolers (ages 1-4), a child's risk of being overweight increased by six percent for every hour of television watched per day. If that child had a TV in his or her bedroom, the odds of being overweight jumped an additional thirty-one percent for every hour watched. Preschool children with TVs in their bedroom watched an additional 4.8 hours of TV or videos every week⁷.

Compared to children who have less than 2 hours of screen time a day, children who have more are more likely to:

- > be overweight
- > be less physically active
- > drink more sugary drinks
- > snack on foods high in sugar, salt and fat
- > have fewer social interactions.⁸

Excessive TV has been linked to other negative outcomes such as poor cognitive performance, antisocial behaviour and reduced sleep time⁹

Research now indicates that for every hour of television children watch each day, their risk of developing attention-related problems later increases by ten percent. For example, if a child watches three hours of television each day, the child would be thirty percent more likely to develop attention deficit disorder¹⁰.





For the purposes of OPAL the main concern is the **link between obesity and electronic media use (mainly TV viewing)** and the desire to **increase the overall levels of physical activity** within our communities.

Australian Guidelines for screen time:

- > Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations recommend that 5-18 y.o accumulate no more than 2 hours of screen time a day for entertainment (excluding educational purposes)¹¹.
- > Guidelines for children under five have also been released and recommend children younger than 2 years do not spend anytime viewing TV or other electronic media and for children 2-5 years less than 1 hour per day.¹²

Existing Screen time behaviour

According to the 2007 National Australian Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey – South Australian Findings¹³:

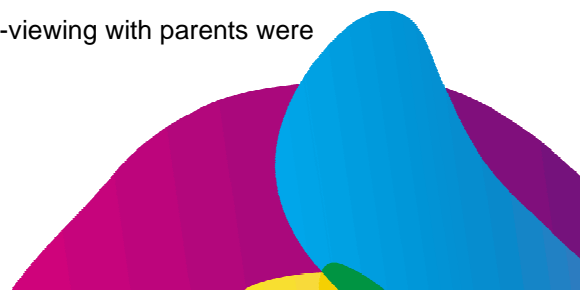
- > South Australia has a significantly higher amount of screen time (peaking at 4.5hours/day for 13-14 year olds) than the National average (peaking at 4hours/day for 13-14 year olds).
- > Significant differences in screen time exist across SES bands. Children of the lowest SES quartile accumulate 30-50 mins more screen time than children of higher SES. In addition High SES children have 30 min /day more school-related time and 20 min/day more sport than low SES children¹⁴.
- > Screen time is highest in holidays and on weekends. Adolescents spent an extra 100mins/day in front of small screens on weekends and public holidays,
- > Boys accumulate about 40mins/day more screen time than girls
- > Screen time rises rapidly until the ages of 13-14 then declines slowly.
- > 75% of screen time is TV at age 9 dropping to 60% by age 16,

Other research shows that:

- > Obese children watch more TV and accumulate more screen time than non-obese children¹⁵
- > Watching TV for 2hrs per day during childhood and adolescence has been shown to attribute to 17% of adult overweight¹⁶.
- > The peak time for TV watching for 10-13 year olds is 7pm at night followed by the time from 4pm to 7pm and with another peak at 7am¹⁷.

Determinants of screen time

- > Families are important influencers on how children use their time:
 - Having a mother who watches more than 2hrs of TV per day and co-viewing with parents were the strongest predictor of adolescents watching TV¹⁸





- Parents feel they were time-poor, working long hours and spending more time with younger siblings, leaving minimal time to be active with their older children. This resulted in using small screen recreation as a proxy-babysitter¹⁹.
- > Critical role of siblings and caregivers as role models in relation to physical activity
- > Monitoring rules and restrictions²⁰:
 - Mothers are the gatekeepers
 - Most regulate EM use through rules and restrictions eg. no TV before school
- > Physical home environment²¹:
 - Parents recognise TV in bedrooms as a concern but more in terms of being ready for school on time and adhering to bed times
 - TV in child's bedroom was positively associated with weight status in some studies²²
- > Substantial number of children begin watching TV during pre-school years and these patterns persist into childhood and adolescence²³
- > Changes in TV viewing have been found to be influenced more by :
 - Child's desire to turn off the TV and play with parents
 - Home rules about how long they can watch TV²⁴

Social/cultural issues

- > Some families see co-viewing as “family time”²⁵
- > Parents perceived participation in physical activity and social activities as countering sedentary time.
- > TV plays an important role in assisting busy mothers cope with young children²⁶
- > Many parents value TV as a good educational tool
- > Any concern over TV watching is usually about content (violence, language) not relationship to obesity¹⁰

Barriers to changing behaviour

- > Parents or children (11-12yo) are not concerned about excessive time spent with EM^{10 27}
- > Parents identified their own propensity toward TV viewing and their own sedentary behaviour as a negative example for their children^{10 19} but were reluctant to change their own behaviour to reduce screen time²⁸
- > Parents underestimate their children's use of electronic media^{28 29}
- > Parents need to use TV as a safe and affordable distraction and rely on this for them to complete chores^{19 28}





- > Parents' belief that on weekends children should be able to spend leisure time as they wish ²⁸
- > Parents of younger children (6-7 years) feel more empowered to restrict TV viewing than parents of older children ²⁸
- > Parents and children were more open to limits on weekdays and school nights than weekends and holidays when viewing time peaked ²⁸
- > Perceived lack of in home affordable alternatives ²⁸
- > Limits on TV perceived as a good thing but many feel it did not apply to them ²⁸
- > A lack of rules around time spent watching EM was thought to be a barrier to reducing EM use, split households with different rules, the busy lives of parents or a breakdown in parental authority may explain why rules may not be present and/or enforced ¹⁹

Benefits of reducing screen time

- > Parents identified closer family communication and improved school performance as potential positive impacts of reducing TV viewing ²⁸

Potential approaches promoted in the literature

- > Stages of Change model useful in conceptualising interventions to reduce screen time. Most parents at pre-contemplation (not considering a change and unaware of issue) ²⁸.
- > To move them to contemplation stage messages should appeal to benefits that parents already value and address barriers by making behaviour change easier eg. small incremental changes ³⁰.
- > Raising parental awareness of the association between TV and childhood obesity ¹⁵
- > Increasing awareness about risks associated with excessive screen time (including negative psychological, behavioural and physiological side effects)
- > Increase awareness about current guidelines
- > Informing parents of simple changes like removing TV's from bedrooms and turning TV off during dinner ¹⁵
- > Interventions that target family TV viewing practices, parents in particular are more likely to be effective than interventions which directly target adolescent viewing times ²⁶
- > Mothers are capable of and willing to set and enforce EM rules within their households ²⁷
- > Introducing curfews eg. no TV after 8pm, before 8am or between 3.30-6pm has the potential to reduce screen time by 23%, 5.2% and 20% respectively. ¹⁷

Potential messages to parents ²⁸:

- > Pay attention to how much children spend using all screen based media
- > Do not put TV's in children's bedrooms





- > Eliminate background TV
- > Limit TV on School Days
- > Identify Non-screen, in home activities that are pleasurable to children
- > No TV in eating areas





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- ¹² Department of Health and Ageing (2009). Get Up and Grow – healthy eating and physical activity for early childhood. Family book.
- ¹³ SA Government. 2007 National Australian Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey – South Australian Findings.
- ¹⁴ Correspondence with Tim Olds 14/4/10
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