

TV Facts

This article is online at: http://www.red-branch.com/tv_and_your_child.htm

Television watching reduces time available to participate in healthy activities and increases exposure to the marketing of unhealthy products. Children who watch a lot of TV have a greater risk for a range of health problems. Excessive TV watching has also been linked to poor academic performance.

Our work in schools has highlighted that Irish children watch an awful lot of TV. The following statistics are based on the results of our School Lifestyle Survey:

- Thirty percent of National School students watch TV for more than 3 hours per day
- In some National Schools, more than 60% of students have a TV in their bedroom
- In some secondary schools, 70% of students have a TV in their bedroom
- In most schools (primary and secondary), well over 50% of students have a TV in their bedroom
- One-fifth of secondary school students watch TV for more than three hours per day

These statistics are based on what the students themselves reported during our surveys. You should note that when we give workshops on this issue, we have found that children and young people are usually a bit embarrassed about the amount of TV they watch. We suspect that this leads them to underestimate their hours spent watching TV.

How TV Hooks Us

We all tend to notice movement, and TV takes advantage of this fact. Television is even more distracting because it contains a combination of images and sounds. If you try to have a conversation with somebody in a room where a TV set is on, it will be almost impossible for you to stop glancing at the set now and again.

When you sit down to watch TV, you will almost instantly start to relax. You will tend to become less alert, and more passive. When you stop watching, you won't feel relaxed any more, but you will remain passive and less alert ...which you may notice as a feeling of being "drained" or lacking energy. An instant antidote to this unrelaxed state is...more TV! Watching more will tend to relax you again, and some scientists think that heavy TV users are drawn into a vicious circle in this way. It is common for people to report that they watch more TV than they intend to. Some psychologists even believe that people can suffer from TV addiction.

Whether or not you can be addicted to TV, if the habit affects your ability to lead an active life it should be taken seriously.

TV Violence

When children see violent events, they are more likely to believe that something bad will happen to them. Young children may also not understand that violence can hurt and kill people. When the TV "good-guys" are violent, this is usually portrayed as acceptable...and when the bad guys are violent, the violence often goes unpunished.

TV, Health and Performance

Heavy television watching is likely to affect performance in school, and may even affect children's development. TV watching before the age of 3 can lead to problems in development of the ability to think and reason later on in childhood [1]. Children with a TV in their bedroom tend to do less well in academic tests [2], and TV viewing in childhood and adolescence has been linked with poor educational achievement in later life [3].

Children who watch lots of TV have a greater risk of becoming overweight. Children with a TV in their bedroom are at an even greater risk [4-6]. Prolonged TV watching is associated with an increased risk of type II diabetes [7], and limiting TV and computer games in children may help to prevent type II diabetes [8]. Girls who watch a lot of TV may be at an increased risk of getting an eating disorder [9]. Kids who watch more TV tend to start smoking at a younger age [10]. TV watching has been linked to risk factors for atherosclerosis/CVD in adults [11, 12].

It is common for children to ignore their natural sleep rhythms when watching TV and this may result in daytime fatigue and other health problems. TV viewing in infants and toddlers is linked to irregular sleeping patterns [13]. Adolescents and young adults who watch lots of TV have a greater risk of sleep problems [14].

Adults who watch lots of TV tend to have an increased risk of type II diabetes and obesity [7, 15-18]. Watching lots of TV in mid-life has been linked to an increased risk of Alzheimer's Disease [19].

TV doesn't usually show the consequences of having sex. On the other hand, sex on TV is usually portrayed as exciting, normal and risk free. Teenagers that watch sexually explicit TV programmes may even become sexually active at an earlier age [20].

For many people, television watching constitutes a dependence, and TV may even be considered an addiction in some individuals [21].

References

1. Zimmerman, F.J. and D.A. Christakis, Children's television viewing and cognitive outcomes: a longitudinal analysis of national data. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 2005. 159(7): p. 619-25.
2. Borzekowski, D.L. and T.N. Robinson, The remote, the mouse, and the no. 2 pencil: the household media environment and academic achievement among third grade students. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 2005. 159(7): p. 607-13.
3. Hancox, R.J., B.J. Milne, and R. Poulton, Association of television viewing during childhood with poor educational achievement. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 2005. 159(7): p. 614-8.
4. Dennison, B.A., T.A. Erb, and P.L. Jenkins, Television viewing and television in bedroom associated with overweight risk among low-income preschool children. *Pediatrics*, 2002. 109(6): p. 1028-35.
5. Robinson, T.N., Television viewing and childhood obesity. *Pediatr Clin North Am*, 2001. 48(4): p. 1017-25.
6. Eisenmann, J.C., R.T. Barteel, and M.Q. Wang, Physical activity, TV viewing, and weight in U.S. youth: 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. *Obes Res*, 2002. 10(5): p. 379-85.
7. Hu, F.B., Sedentary lifestyle and risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes. *Lipids*, 2003. 38(2): p. 103-8.
8. Botero, D. and J.I. Wolfsdorf, Diabetes mellitus in children and adolescents. *Arch Med Res*, 2005. 36(3): p. 281-90.
9. Fouts, G. and K. Vaughan, Locus of control, television viewing, and eating disorder symptomatology in young females. *J Adolesc*, 2002. 25(3): p. 307-11.
10. Gutschoven, K. and J. Van den Bulck, Television viewing and age at smoking initiation: does a relationship exist between higher levels of television viewing and earlier onset of smoking? *Nicotine Tob Res*, 2005. 7(3): p. 381-5.
11. Kronenberg, F., et al., Influence of leisure time physical activity and television watching on atherosclerosis risk factors in the NHLBI Family Heart Study. *Atherosclerosis*, 2000. 153(2): p. 433-43.
12. Fung, T.T., et al., Leisure-time physical activity, television watching, and plasma biomarkers of obesity and cardiovascular disease risk. *Am J Epidemiol*, 2000. 152(12): p. 1171-8.

13. Thompson, D.A. and D.A. Christakis, The association between television viewing and irregular sleep schedules among children less than 3 years of age. *Pediatrics*, 2005. 116(4): p. 851-6.
14. Johnson, J.G., et al., Association between television viewing and sleep problems during adolescence and early adulthood. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 2004. 158(6): p. 562-8.
15. Dunstan, D.W., et al., Physical activity and television viewing in relation to risk of undiagnosed abnormal glucose metabolism in adults. *Diabetes Care*, 2004. 27(11): p. 2603-9.
16. Hu, F.B., et al., Television watching and other sedentary behaviors in relation to risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes mellitus in women. *Jama*, 2003. 289(14): p. 1785-91.
17. Hu, F.B., et al., Physical activity and television watching in relation to risk for type 2 diabetes mellitus in men. *Arch Intern Med*, 2001. 161(12): p. 1542-8.
18. Davison, K.K., L.A. Francis, and L.L. Birch, Links between parents' and girls' television viewing behaviors: a longitudinal examination. *J Pediatr*, 2005. 147(4): p. 436-42.
19. Lindstrom, H.A., et al., The relationships between television viewing in midlife and the development of Alzheimer's disease in a case-control study. *Brain Cogn*, 2005. 58(2): p. 157-65.
20. Collins, R.L., et al., Watching sex on television predicts adolescent initiation of sexual behavior. *Pediatrics*, 2004. 114(3): p. e280-9.
21. Kubey, R. and M. Csikszentmihalyi, Television addiction is no mere metaphor. *Sci Am*, 2002. 286(2): p. 74-80.