



Television and the Under 3 Crowd: Making Good Decisions About “Screen Time” for Young Children

Connection Between Television and Obesity

Some research studies (with low-income, multiethnic preschoolers ages 1–5) have found that the more television shows or videos the children watch, the more likely they are to be obese.

What You Can Do:

Limit TV and other “screen time.” The more children are watching, the less they are playing. Choose programs that do not have commercials (or play videos or DVDs instead). Young children are vulnerable to the messages they see in commercials for “junk” food that often play during children’s programming. If you show television programs, consider muting the television during commercials.

Ensure children have adequate physical play opportunities. Go to the park whenever possible, kick a ball around, dance inside to music, or hop down the sidewalk. These activities all help young children build muscle and develop coordination, balance, and teamwork skills.

Provide healthy snacks and meals. Do not allow children to eat while watching television. Research shows that children eat more when they are served food while watching TV.

Beware of Background Television

Background television is programming that is on “in the background” and is not the main focus of a child’s attention. Many children live or spend time in households where the television is on for many hours of the day.

The problem with background television is that these shows are usually not designed for young children. This means the content is often inappropriate or distressing to babies and toddlers. In addition, research has shown that background television interrupts children’s play, as they are distracted by the sounds and action on the screen. An additional concern is that background television takes the adult’s attention away from the child, and may cut down on play and interaction between adult and child.

What You Can Do:

Go “TV free.” Once children adjust to the change, they won’t miss it. Or, make a habit of turning off the television when children are done watching a show. Avoid leaving the television on all day in the background. Play music instead or let children make their own “shows” by using puppets or dress-up clothes.

Avoid programs that are not age appropriate for children, even if these shows are just on “in the background.” These programs can be confusing, distressing, and frightening for young children.