

# Decreasing Screen Time:

Interrupt your child's regularly scheduled programming to give them a healthier start on life.

With more electronic entertainment options than ever before (48% of families with children ages 2 – 17 have a TV, VCR, video game console, and computer<sup>1</sup>), it is harder to get children up and moving. During the last 20 years, the number of children in the United States who are physically active has decreased while the number of children who are overweight has doubled.<sup>2</sup> The average American child spends over four and a half hours in front of a screen each day (TV, video tapes, video games or a computer), and watching TV accounts for two and a half of those hours alone.<sup>3</sup> This national epidemic of overweight and obesity can be partly attributed to the over-consumption of media by children.

Recent studies conclude that the amount of time children spend watching television has a direct relationship to their weight. Children who viewed the most number of hours of television per day had the highest prevalence of obesity (this held true regardless of age, race/ethnicity and family income). Children that were limited to one hour or less of TV per day were far less likely to be overweight than those who watch more.<sup>4</sup> Boys and girls who watched more than four hours of TV per day had more body fat than those who watched less than two hours.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, children that watched more hours per day of TV and for longer periods of time were less likely to engage in physical activity.<sup>6</sup>

The number of hours spent watching television is more of a concern for older teens (ages 11 to 13)<sup>7</sup> and minorities.<sup>8</sup> More children aged 11 to 13 years watch four or more hours of TV per day.<sup>9</sup> Research shows that minority children watch more hours of television per week than Caucasian children.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is important that children of color be encouraged to engage more in physical activities. This is especially true for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute reports that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders exercise less compared to the general population.<sup>11</sup>

## Switching Channels

The lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and increased media consumption

contribute to emerging health issues for our children, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure<sup>12</sup>, diabetes, gall bladder disease and sleep apnea.<sup>13</sup> One of the best ways to combat inactivity begins with monitoring their entertainment habits. Consider setting an example for your kids by watching less television yourself. Children whose parents watch more than two hours of TV per day spend significantly more time with TV, the Internet, watching videos and playing video games.<sup>14</sup>

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that you can make a big impact in your child's life by taking these simple steps:

1. Remove TV sets from your child's bedroom.<sup>15</sup> Kids who watch television in their rooms watch an average of 4.6 more hours a week and are more likely to be overweight.<sup>16</sup>
2. Limit children's total media time (with entertainment media) to no more than one to two hours per day.<sup>17</sup> Studies have shown that for each additional hour children spend watching TV a day, there is a two percent increase in the chance that they'll be overweight.<sup>18</sup>
3. Watch TV with your child and discuss the content.<sup>19</sup>
4. Encourage alternative entertainment for children.<sup>20</sup> Try activities that include both physical activities and pro-social involvement, such as joining school and community clubs, taking classes or being active with the family. In fact, physical activity can help control weight, lower blood pressure as well as reduce feelings of depression and anxiety.<sup>21</sup>

A healthy routine is an active one. For more information on the epidemic of overweight children in the U.S., check out [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa) or [www.aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/physicalactivity](http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/physicalactivity) or [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org). Set the example for your kids and you'll enjoy the benefits for years to come.



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- 5 Andersen, RE et al., *Relationship of Physical Activity and Television Watching with Body Weight and Level of Fitness Among Children*, JAMA March 1998
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Dennison, BA, *Television Viewing and Television in Bedroom Associated with Overweight Risk Among Low-Income Preschool Children*, Pediatrics, June 2002
- 9 Andersen, RE et al., *Relationship of Physical Activity and Television Watching with Body Weight and Level of Fitness Among Children*, JAMA March 1998
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- 11 National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, 2000
- 12 The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity, 2001
- 13 American Academy of Pediatrics, 2002
- 14 Woodard, EH, *Media in the Home 2000: The 5th Annual Survey of Parents and Children*, 2000
- 15 The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education Children, Adolescents and Television, Pediatrics, February 2001
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- 18 Dennison, BA, *Television Viewing and Television in Bedroom Associated with Overweight Risk Among Low-Income Preschool Children*, Pediatrics, June 2002
- 19 The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education Children, Adolescents and Television, Pediatrics, February 2001
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 President's Report on Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports, November 2002

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2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *The Importance of Regular Physical Activity for Children*, May 2002

3 Woodard, EH, *Media in the Home 2000: The 5th Annual Survey of Parents and Children*, 2000

4 Crespo, CJ et al., *Television Watching, Energy Intake, and Obesity in US Children: Results from the Third NHANES*, Archives of Pediatric