

# FitFuture

strategies for better living.

Series on Fitness & Nutrition for Families

## It's Time for a Great American Screen Wean!

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Adopting and maintaining a physically active lifestyle can be challenging. An obstacle to being more physically active is the amount of sedentary time spent in front of a screen — television, computer, video games, DVDs, etc.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that children participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day. Excessive time in front of a screen is cutting into time for physical activity. Health experts warn that excessive sedentary behavior disrupts one's energy balance, making it easier to gain weight.

### On average each day, 8–18-year-olds spend:

- Almost four hours watching TV, DVDs, and prerecorded shows
- Just over one hour on a computer
- About 50 minutes playing video games

### Among 8-18-year-olds:

- Two-thirds have TVs in their bedrooms
- Two-thirds own video game players
- One-third have computers in their bedrooms

Children and teens with TVs in their rooms spend 1 ½ hours or more a day watching TV than their peers without TVs in their rooms.

Parents and caregivers must set the example for children by their participation in regular physical activity, as well by setting expectations for screen time. **Among 8-18-year-olds:**

- 53% said their parents do not have rules about TV watching
- 46% said they do have rules, but only 20% said the rules are regularly enforced

Children for whom TV rules are enforced report two hours less daily media exposure than those children without supervision.

Health experts recommend no more than 2 hours screen time per day that is not school-related, such as watching documentaries, researching or typing a paper. It is very important that parents and caregivers discuss screen time with their children and set a daily allowance of time.

### Follow these simple tips:

- Remove the TV from your child's bedroom
- Sign a family agreement to restrict screen time to 2 hours or less per day
- Encourage each family member to keep a screen time log
- Allow each family member to choose ways to be physically active together

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#### Resources:

Henry J. Kaiser Foundation's survey, "Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8–18 Year Olds"  
<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds-Report-Introduction.pdf>

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