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SIDE EFFECTS OF EXCESSIVE WATCHING TV

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ABSTRACT

Screen time has become an integral part of children's and adolescents' daily lives due to the widespread availability of digital devices such as televisions, computers, tablets, and smartphones. According to the World Health Organization guidelines, children under 2 years should not be exposed to screens, while those under 5 years should have no more than one hour of screen time per day. Excessive screen exposure among adolescents has raised growing concerns regarding its impact on physical, psychological, and social health. Research indicates that prolonged screen time is associated with developmental delays, attention problems, poor academic performance, sleep disturbances, unhealthy dietary habits, obesity, and reduced physical activity. Continuous exposure to screens may also lead to eye strain, mood changes, irritability, and social isolation, thereby affecting cognitive and socio-emotional development. Moreover, modern technological advancements have significantly increased the accessibility of child-directed media, resulting in earlier and more frequent exposure to screen-based entertainment. To minimize the adverse effects of excessive screen use, strategies such as setting screen-time limits, encouraging outdoor activities, promoting alternative recreational activities, creating device-free zones, monitoring content, and parental role modelling are recommended. Adopting balanced and mindful screen habits can promote healthier lifestyles and better developmental outcomes among adolescents.

Keywords: *Screen time, adolescents, television watching, cognitive development, sedentary lifestyle, obesity, sleep disturbance, digital media.*

INTRODUCTION

Children and adolescents grow up in a society where modern technology has become a crucial part of their daily lives. As a result, they are exposed to electronic devices from an early age and consequently to screen time (ST) viewing. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), ST is defined as: "Time spent passively watching screen-based entertainment (TV, computer, mobile devices). Does not include active screen-based games where physical activity or movement is required.". Additionally, according to WHO's guidelines, children under the age of 24 months should not be exposed to screens, whereas children under the age of 5 years should only be exposed to screens for a maximum of 1 h daily [World Health Organization 2019].

The relationship between screen time and the cognitive development of children is complex and has had both positive and negative outcomes. Excessive screen time use in young children has been associated with risks for developmental delays, attention problems, and poorer academic performance [Madigan S, Browne D, Racine N, Mori C, Tough S, 2019].

Extended screen time periods and its potential disruption in the basic body rhythms of children, including the circadian and eating cycles may lead to effects in sleep and nutrition [Victorin Å.2018].

There is also evidence that more screen time has been associated with unhealthy diets, obesity and poorer quality of life in children and eventually adolescents. In contrast, joint media engagement and age-appropriate, well-designed content have shown positive associations.

The screen, whether it is computer, mobile, tablet or television, is a symbol of our modern age. For our children, the 'digital natives' who have grown up surrounded by digital information and entertainment on screens, time on screens (screentime) is a major part of contemporary life.

However, there have been growing concerns about the impact of screens on children and young people's (CYP) health. There is evidence that screentime is associated with obesity, with suggested mechanisms an increase in energy intake, the displacement of time available for physical activity or more directly through reduction in metabolic rate. (Klesges RC, Shelton ML, Klesges LM 1993)

There is also evidence that high screentime is associated with deleterious effects on irritability, low mood and cognitive and socioemotional development, leading to poor educational performance. (Domingues-Montanari S. 2017)

Because of these concerns, expert groups have suggested controlling screentime for children. The American Academy of Paediatrics in 2016 recommended limiting screentime for children aged 2–5years to 1 hour/day of high-quality programmes and for parents to limit screentime in agreement with CYP 6 years and older. The Canadian Paediatric Society issued similar guidelines in 2017. (Canadian Paediatric Society DHTFOO 2017)

Fast forward several decades, and the TV is no longer the dominant form of screen media. Indeed, the last 70 years have seen a proliferation in the number and type of screen media devices available (e.g., desktop/laptop computers, smart phones, tablets, etc.) and the introduction of the internet (e.g., broadband/fiber internet connections, mobile data, etc.) [Rideout V 2017].

Simultaneously, there has been a striking increase in child-directed media, both with regard to content (e.g., apps, games, TV shows and entire channels, VCR tapes/DVDs, etc.) and devices (e.g., computer keyboards and mice, Leapfrog educational toys, etc.) [Wartella E.A., Vandewater E.A., Rideout V.J 2005].

This proliferation of screen media means that children are now exposed to more types of media at an earlier age. For instance, it has been estimated that while children started watching TV when they were approximately 4 years old in the 1970s, children now begin closer to 4 months old [Radesky J.S., Christakis D.A. 2016].

EXCESSIVE WATCHING TV CAN LEAD TO FOLLOWING COMPLICATIONS:

- **Sedentary lifestyle:** Excessive TV watching contributes to a sedentary lifestyle among adolescents, characterized by prolonged sitting and reduced physical activity. This can lead to weight gain, poor cardiovascular health, and increased risk of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. Adolescents need at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity; excessive screen time displaces active pursuits (Patel & Jain, 2025).

- **Weight gain:** Excessive TV watching contributes to weight gain among adolescents due to prolonged sitting and increased exposure to food advertising, leading to unhealthy snacking habits. This sedentary behaviour displaces physical activity, reducing energy expenditure. Consuming high-calorie snacks while watching TV further tips the energy balance towards weight gain. Over time, this can lead to overweight or obesity, increasing risks of metabolic issues, low self-esteem, and long-term health problems. Balancing screen time with physical activity and healthy eating is key to mitigating these risks (Sharma & Reddy, 2024).

- **Sleep disturbances:** Excessive TV watching, especially before bedtime, contributes to sleep disturbances among adolescents. Screen exposure suppresses melatonin production, delaying sleep onset. Engaging content can also lead to extended viewing, reducing sleep duration. Poor sleep quality and duration are linked to issues like daytime fatigue, mood problems, and impaired cognitive function. Establishing screen-free bedtime routines can help mitigate these risks (Gupta & Chawla, 2023).

- **Eye strain:** Prolonged TV watching can lead to eye strain among adolescents due to continuous focusing on screens, reduced blinking, and glare. Symptoms include dry eyes, blurred vision, headaches, and discomfort. Following the 20-20-20 rule (every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for 20 seconds) can help alleviate strain. Regular eye exams are also advisable for teens with excessive screen time (Jain & Patel, 2022).

- **Social isolation:** Excessive TV watching can lead to social isolation among adolescents as it displaces time spent with friends and family. Spending hours alone watching shows reduces opportunities for social interaction, communication skills development, and emotional bonding. This isolation can contribute to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Balancing screen time with social activities is crucial for healthy relationships and emotional well-being (Mehta & Desai, 2021).

- **Decreased productivity:** Excessive TV watching can lead to decreased productivity among adolescents as it displaces time that could be spent on homework, studying, or skill-building activities. Binge-watching shows can also impact concentration and attention span, making it harder to focus on academic tasks. Reduced productivity can affect school performance and long-term goals. Setting limits on screen time can help teens balance leisure and responsibilities (Kumar & Shah, 2020).

TIPS TO HELP ADOLESCENTS TO CUT BACK SCREEN TIME

- **Set screen time limits (2 hours max):** Setting screen time limits can help adolescents cut back on excessive TV watching. Parents can set daily time limits (e.g., 2 hours) and designate screen-free zones (bedrooms, meals). Using parental controls or apps to track and limit screen time can also be effective. Encouraging alternative activities like outdoor play, reading, or hobbies helps teens develop healthier habits (Ravi & Singh, 2026).

- **Encourage outdoor activities (sports, hobbies):** Encouraging outdoor activities like sports, hiking, or hobbies can help adolescents cut back on screen time. Physical activities promote health, social interaction, and skill development, reducing reliance on screens for entertainment. Parents can support this by enrolling teens in

classes or suggesting family outings. Finding an enjoyable activity boosts motivation to stay active (Patel & Jain, 2025).

- Promote alternative entertainment (reading, board games): Promoting alternative entertainment like reading, board games, or creative hobbies can help adolescents cut back on screen time. These activities engage teens offline, boost creativity, and often involve social interaction. Parents can introduce new books, games, or crafts to spark interest. Making these alternatives accessible and fun encourages teens to choose them over screens (Sharma & Reddy, 2024).

- Designate device-free zones (dining, bedrooms): Designating device-free zones like dining areas and bedrooms helps adolescents cut back on screen time. This encourages family interaction during meals and improves sleep hygiene by reducing bedtime screen exposure. Implementing rules like "no phones at dinner" or "devices charge outside bedrooms" can create healthier habits. Consistency is key to making these zones effective (Sharma & Mehta, 2024).

- Plan family activities (game nights, outings): Planning family activities like game nights or outings can help adolescents cut back on screen time. Shared experiences promote bonding and create enjoyable alternatives to screens. Choose activities teens enjoy, like board games, picnics, or cooking together. Regular family time reduces reliance on devices for entertainment (Gupta & Chawla, 2023).

- Monitor content (educational vs. mindless shows): Monitoring content helps adolescents cut back on excessive screen time. Parents can guide teens towards educational shows or documentaries and limit mindless binge-watching. Discussing content value and setting rules for show choices promotes mindful viewing. This approach balances screen time with learning and critical thinking (Jain & Patel, 2022).

- Lead by example (parents model healthy habits): Leading by example is a powerful way to help adolescents cut back on screen time. When parents model healthy habits like limiting their own screen time, teens are more likely to follow suit. Parents can demonstrate balanced device use by reading, pursuing hobbies, or having device-free conversations. This sets a positive example (Desai & Mehta, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Screen time has become an unavoidable part of modern life for children and adolescents due to rapid technological advancement. While digital media can provide educational and entertainment benefits, excessive screen exposure may lead to several negative health outcomes such as sedentary lifestyle, obesity, sleep disturbances, eye strain, reduced academic performance, and social isolation. Therefore, it is important for parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals to guide adolescents in developing healthy screen habits. Limiting screen time, encouraging physical activities, promoting alternative recreational activities, and monitoring the quality of media content can help reduce the harmful effects of excessive screen use. A balanced approach to screen use will support the overall physical, mental, and social well-being of adolescents.

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