

***Why Weight?* Reducing the Influence of TV on Children's Health**

Participant Handout

There is at least one television set in 98 percent of U.S. homes. Families watch TV for many reasons. Sometimes it's used for entertainment. At other times, it may be used for education. Busy parents may use TV for babysitting.

Regular television programming didn't begin until the late 1940s, so older adults may not have gotten acquainted with TV as a child. Children today, however, grow up with television from birth. It can influence them in many ways.

Most research has shown a link between too much TV watching and childhood obesity. About 10 percent of 2- to 5-year-olds and 15 percent of 6- to 19-year-olds are overweight. Even more are at risk of being overweight. African-American and Hispanic children are especially at risk.

Excess weight can lead to diabetes, heart disease, joint problems, asthma and other breathing problems, and depression. The U.S. Surgeon General has predicted that the health costs of obesity will soon exceed those of tobacco in this country. Sadly, the emotional stress of being a "fat kid" may be just as damaging as the physical health problems.

There may be several explanations for the link between children's TV viewing and their weight. First, children usually sit still while they watch TV. As a result, they miss out on physical activity that would burn calories. (Children need to be active for at least 60 minutes every day for good health) If they snack while watching TV, children may be getting excess calories. The commercials for high-fat, high-sugar foods encourage them to eat even more.

Reducing children's television viewing is an important step toward good health.

Do You Know?

Q1 How many hours do children aged 2 to 17 watch TV every day?

2 hours 3 hours 5 hours

Q2 How many children under age 2 watch TV every day?

5 percent 22 percent 43 percent

Q3 How many children age 6 and younger have a TV in their bedrooms?

12 percent 36 percent 55 percent

Q4 How many children age 6 and younger live in homes where the TV is usually on "always" or "most of the time", even if no one is watching?

36 percent 66 percent 75 percent

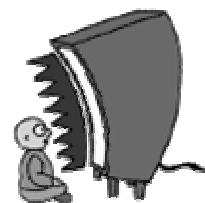
Q5 What is the most frequently advertised product during children's TV programming?

Food Toys Clothes

Are You Aware?

Advertising both informs as well as sells. Can you identify the products that these jingles have advertised on television?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>___ Betcha can't eat just one.</p> <p>___ For those who think young.</p> <p>___ Kid tested. Mother approved.</p> <p>___ You deserve a break today.</p> <p>___ Good to the last drop.</p> <p>___ Where's the beef?</p> <p>___ Taste the rainbow</p> | <p>A. Wendy's</p> <p>B. Maxwell House coffee</p> <p>C. Lay's potato chips</p> <p>D. McDonald's</p> <p>E. Pepsi</p> <p>F. Kix cereal</p> <p>G. Skittles candy</p> |
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Children and Television Advertising

Young children may view 20,000 to 40,000 television commercials each year. Foods high in sugar and fat are advertised frequently. There is a link between hours of television that children watch and the number of requests that they make for advertised products.

Adults can help children resist food advertising.

- Get informed by watching children's television programming (such as early Saturday morning or after school).

Keep a food ad log like the one below. Record each food commercial (including repeats).

Analyze the ads. What type of products were advertised? What persuasive techniques were used?

Television Food Advertising Log

TV program	Time slot	TV station	Product advertised

- Take some time to watch TV with young children.
Talk about the persuasive advertising techniques used to sell products (such as hidden promises of fun, health, happiness and excitement).

Each time you watch together, make at least one critical viewing comment such as “Will that sports drink really make you run faster?”

If you see public service announcements that promote healthy behavior, reinforce the messages. For example, “VERB™ – It’s what you do.” is a national marketing campaign coordinated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It encourages youth aged 9 to 13 to be physically active every day. (See “For more information” for web site.)

- Go to a grocery store and help children read labels for advertised foods.
What is listed first on the ingredient list (sugar? fat?). The ingredient listed first is most abundant.

Food Advertising Regulation

There are few policies or standards for food advertising and marketing aimed at children. The advertising industry has voluntary policies that cover areas such as product presentations and claims, endorsement and promotion by program characters, sales pressures, disclosures and disclaimers, and safety concerns. The Federal Trade Commission regulates advertising deemed unfair or deceptive. The FTC is not currently empowered to further limit advertising to children.

The Children’s Television Act (passed by Congress in 1990) mandates advertising limits during programming aired primarily to children under age 12:

10.5 minutes per hour on weekends
12 minutes per hour on weekdays.

Reducing or regulating food advertising targeted to children has been proposed. Many options have been suggested such as:

- Banning advertising to preschoolers
- Providing “equal time” for messages on nutrition or fitness to counteract food ads in children’s shows
- Providing parental “warnings” about the nutritional value of advertised foods
- Prohibiting food advertising in school-based TV programs such as Channel One

Reducing the Impact of Television

Small steps can make a difference in reducing the influence of television on children's weight and health. Parents have an important role. Older adults can help, too. If you don't have grandchildren nearby, reach out to young children in your community through schools or child care centers.

- **Set a good example.**

Be aware that young children are watching you. Be physically active and eat healthy food. If you provide child care, limit your own TV viewing. (See the self-assessment on page 6.)

- **Choose when the TV is on.**

Turn off the TV when no one is watching. Use a VCR or DVD to tape shows that conflict with children's outside play time.

- **Turn off the TV during meals shared with children.**

This helps you focus on what and how much is eaten. Mealtimes are an opportunity for family conversation. (Avoid unpleasant or stressful topics.) Turn on quiet background music if you like.

- **Promote active lives rather than passive viewing.**

Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. Take a walk or play outside together. At home, use videotapes and DVDs that help children be active while they watch TV (such as dancing to music.) Check the public library and video rental stores for possibilities.

- **Inform families about the impact of television on children (including their weight).**

Tell them about the "screen time" recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Encourage them to keep TVs out of children's bedrooms and turned off during meals.

- **Support Turn Off the TV Week (April 25-May 1, 2005)**

This annual event encourages Americans to evaluate the role of television in their lives. (See "For more information" for web site.) Plan an exhibit at a local library to inform families about the impact of television on children's health, or support activities in schools.

- **Get involved in making public policy to regulate children's food advertising .**

Write letters to legislators, to local TV stations, and/or national broadcast networks to express opinions about advertising targeted at children.

Contact school boards about reducing in-school advertising and sales of advertised foods.



Media Contacts:

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)
1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314-1698
<http://www.pbs.org/>

CBS, Inc.
51 West 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019
<http://www.cbs.com>

National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Viewer Relations
30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10112
<http://www.nbc.com>

ABC, Inc.
500 S. Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521-4551
<http://www.abc.go.com>

Fox Broadcasting Company
P.O. Box 900, Beverly Hills, CA 90213
<http://www.foxworld.com>

National Cable Television Association, Inc. (NCTA)
1724 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036
<http://www.ncta.com>

For more information:

Kaiser Family Foundation, Program for the Study of Entertainment and Health
<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/index.cfm>

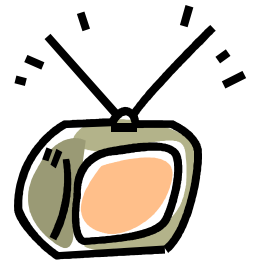
PBS Guide to Children and Media (advertising)
<http://www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/childrenandmedia>

TV-Turnoff Network www.tvturnoff.org
1200 29th Street, NW, Lower Level #1, Washington, DC 20007. Telephone 202-333-9220.

Verb TM It's What You Do
<http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Atlanta Georgia).

Developed by Carolyn Raab, Extension Foods and Nutrition Specialist and Patty Case, Family and Community Development faculty, Klamath County: both of Oregon State University

Television Viewing Self-Assessment



Q1 How many televisions are in your home? ____ TVs
Where are they located?

Q2 How long do you usually watch television shows on weekdays? ____ hours per day
on weekends? ____ hours per day

Q3 What do you watch on television?
____ I channel surf to find something I want to watch
____ I only turn on specific programs
____ Other:

Q4 How often is the television on even if you aren't watching?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Q5 How often do you watch television instead of visiting with friends or doing a hobby?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Q6 How often do you watch television instead of exercising?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Q7 How often do you watch television during meals?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Q8 How often do you snack while you watch television?
Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Q9 Do others influence your TV viewing habits? Yes No

Q10 What changes would you like to make in your television viewing habits?