

## Step It Up to Avoid Childhood Obesity

### Thousands of Steps, Less TV and Video Games Significantly Reduce Kids' Chances of Weight Gain

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April 16, 2008 -- Children who spend more than two hours a day in front of a TV or computer screen and do not get the recommended amount of exercise are taking a step in the wrong direction when it comes to weight gain, new research shows.

The finding, based on a study of 709 children, adds to the growing body of evidence linking sedentary lifestyles and childhood obesity and supports recommendations endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) regarding physical activity and screen time.

The AAP has called for the following:

- Limiting media time such as TV viewing and video game playing to two hours a day
- Boys should take a least 11,000 steps daily
- Girls should take at least 13,000 steps a day

Kelly Laurson and colleagues from Iowa State University and the National Institute on Media and the Family evaluated the AAP's recommendations on children aged 7 to 12 to see how a combination of too much screen time and too little exercise influenced their odds of being overweight.

The children answered questions about the time spent watching TV and playing video games and wore pedometers to track the number of steps they took each day. Some children met some of the AAP recommendations, but few met both.

Laurson's team also took body mass index (BMI) measurements of each child, which revealed that about one out of five children was overweight. Fewer than half met recommendations for physical activity measured by a pedometer, and 27% of boys and 35% girls met the screen time limit.

"Children not meeting the physical activity or exceeding the screen time recommendations were 3-4 times more likely to be overweight than those complying with both recommendations," Laurson says in a news release.

Among those meeting both recommendations:

- 10% of boys were overweight

20% of girls were overweight

Among those who did not meet either recommendation:

35% of boys were overweight

### **Turnoff Week**

More than 12.5 million American children and adolescents are overweight. Children who are overweight and obese are at risk for other conditions such as high blood pressure , high cholesterol , diabetes , and asthma .

Preventing childhood obesity has become a national priority. Encouraging children to live a healthy lifestyle and spend less time in front of the TV or computer may help prevent weight gain that could lead to obesity.

Turnoff Week, April 21-27, 2008, promotes the idea that limiting screen time and boosting physical activity can lead to healthier living. The idea is sponsored in part by the Center for Screen Time Awareness (CSTA) and We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition), a science-based national education program from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

"We know that the more time a child spends in front of the TV or computer, the more likely he or she is to be overweight," Steven K. Galson, MD, MPH, acting U.S. surgeon general, says in a news release. "Kids are spending more time sitting in front of screens every day than they do anything else except perhaps sleeping. For Turnoff Week, we are asking parents to turn off the screens and get active with their kids."

According to the National Institutes of Health, children aged 8 to 18 spend more than six hours a day in front of a TV or computer.

SOURCES: Laurson, K. The Journal of Pediatrics, published online April 17, 2008. DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2008.02.042. (What's this?) News release, The Journal of Pediatrics. News release, National Institutes of Health.

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