



Turn It Off: Limiting Screen Time

Screen time is not just TV, it includes watching DVDs, playing video games or surfing the Internet. All that time in front of a screen crowds out time for regular physical activity—and experts say that children should get at least 60 minutes of activity or more every day. That means there has to be a balance between Screen Time and activity. Plus, sitting in front of a screen can also encourage snacking on unhealthy foods. So by turning off the screen, you can help crank up your kids' energy, re-charge their minds and improve their health.

Fortunately, there are so many things to do that don't use a screen. Even if your child wants to relax, he or she can read a book, doodle or just take a nap (They need those 9 hours of sleep, remember?).

- **Check Yourself:** Know how much Screen Time you and your children are getting, and then set limits for the entire family. You'll be amazed how much extra time you "find" when you turn off the TV or computer.
- **Play It Down:** Using Screen Time to reward or punish a child makes it seem more important than it is. Use praise, encouragement and recognition for physical activity, and make Screen Time a "non-event" in your home.
- **Watch at Once:** If you have a VCR or DVR, you can choose a few of your kids' favorite shows, record them, and then let them watch them all at once. That way, you'll have more time during the rest of the week for activities.
- **Double Time:** When watching TV at home, do jumping jacks, pushups, or crunches during commercial breaks. Set up a stationary bike in the TV room, and encourage kids to move through their favorite shows.
- **After-School Action Plan:** Many kids list watching TV as their #1 after-school activity. Sometimes, they just need help coming up with other things to do. Have your kids make a "Top 10 List" of after-school activities. Just a few examples include riding bikes, shooting hoops, walking the dog, folding laundry or even helping with dinner. Post the list on the fridge, so your kids can check it when they get home.
- **No TV Dinners:** Turn off the TV during mealtime—and take turns talking about the day.
- **Cut the Cord:** Take the TVs and computers out of your kids' bedrooms. Children who have TVs in their rooms spend almost 1-½ hours more each day watching them than their peers. Plus, if your kids are in their rooms watching TV, they're removed from family time.
- **Work It Out:** Use the TV to watch a video—whether it's dancing, tae kwon do or yoga. Put on your sweatbands and have some family fitness time.