

Turn off TV, Turn on a Healthier Lifestyle

"We are raising the most overweight generation of youngsters in American history... The message this week is about saving lives." –Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher at the kickoff of TV-Turnoff Week 2001

The problem:

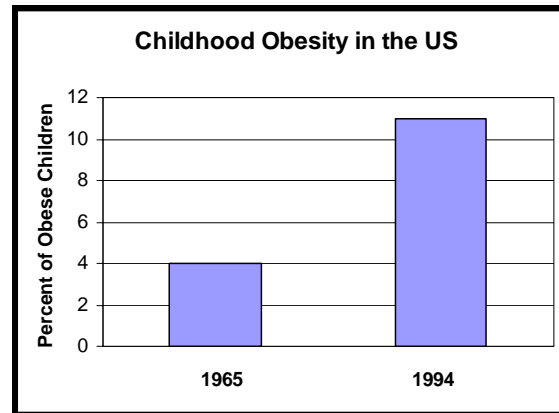
Childhood obesity is now epidemic in the US. One in ten children are obese¹ and one in five are overweight.² Later in life, these children risk suffering from obesity's attendant diseases including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and arthritis.



Already, more than one in four adults in the US are obese.³ With its accompanying health risks, obesity causes an estimated 300,000 premature deaths each year.⁴ It is now the number two preventable cause of death in the United States, behind smoking.⁵

The solution:

Turning off the TV is a great way to improve the health of you and your family. There are two keys to being healthy – exercise and diet. Watching less TV can help you with both of these. That's why, at the kickoff of TV-Turnoff Week 2001, US Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher said, "We are raising the most overweight generation of youngsters in American history...The message this week is about saving lives."



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Exercise More

Don't have time to exercise? You are not alone. Americans, by and large, do not get enough physical exercise. According to the 1996 Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, 60 percent of Americans do not get enough physical exercise to stay healthy and 25 percent engage in no physical activity whatsoever.

Yet many of us have more time than we think. Children in the US average almost three hours of television each day, and adults average over four hours. Cutting back on television is a great way to find the time to play outside, take a walk, or pick up a new sport. According to follow-up surveys, almost three out of four TV-Turnoff Week participants say they exercised more during the Week. According to Dr. William Dietz, Director of the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "The easiest way to reduce inactivity is to turn off the TV set. Almost anything else uses more energy than watching TV." There is no waking activity that we do that burns fewer calories than watching TV - a body in front of the tube is a body at rest.

What is Obesity?

The Centers for Disease Control defines obesity in adults as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher and overweight as a BMI of 25-29.8. BMI is weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. Because children's body fatness changes as they grow, the definition of obesity and overweight in children depends on a child's age and sex. Ask your pediatrician for more information.

TV and Diabetes

The incidence of diabetes increased by one-third between 1990 and 1998 – and most of these cases are type 2, once known as “adult onset” diabetes because it generally occurs in adults and is tied to excess weight and inactivity.⁸ However, in recent years, more and more teens and even children have begun to suffer from type 2. Diabetes is a major cause of blindness, limb amputation, and kidney failure, and raises the risk of heart disease and stroke.⁹

Cutting back on television time can reduce your risk of diabetes. A Harvard University study found that men who spent 40 hours per week watching television were more than twice as likely to get diabetes than those who watched less than two hours each week.¹⁰

Eat Better

Not only does watching television keep you sitting still for long periods of time, but it also encourages an unhealthy diet. TV ads push a diet exactly the opposite of what doctors recommend. One study documented 202 ads for junk food such as sugared cereals, candy, and chips during four hours of Saturday morning cartoons. That amounts to more than eight commercials for unhealthy foods during every 10 minutes of airtime. The high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt diet promoted by commercials is simply not healthy!

Worse yet, research shows that the more television children watch,

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the more likely they are to snack between meals, consume foods advertised on TV, and attempt to influence their parents’ food purchases. For instance, a recent study at Tufts University found that families who had their television sets on during mealtimes consumed more processed meats, salt, soda, and quick-preparation foods and fewer fruits and vegetables.⁶

Turning it off helps keep the weight off!

A recent study by Stanford University Professor Thomas Robinson shows that turning off the television does help keep kids healthier.

By working with two groups of grammar school students, Robinson studied the effect of teaching children to watch less television. The TV-less curricula included 18 lessons and a 10-day TV-Turnoff. Seven months later, the children who watched less television gained an average of two pounds less and the average circumference of their waists was nearly an inch smaller than those who did not.⁷

Because children are influenced by what their parents do, it is important that whatever effort you make to exercise more, eat better, or watch less TV is done as a family.

Take Action

Because children are influenced by what their parents do, it is important that whatever effort you make to exercise more, eat better, or watch less TV is done as a family. In this supporting context, turning off the TV becomes a great family endeavor, a way to bond and spend time together. Start with our TV-Turnoff Tips – and then be sure to turn on life.

TV-Turnoff Tips

- Keep the TV off during meals.
- Exercise as a family by taking walks, riding bikes, or learning a sport.
- Move your television to a less prominent location.
- Designate certain days of the week as TV-free days.
- Do not use television as a reward.
- Remove the TV set from your child’s bedroom.
- Hide the remote.
- Don’t worry if children say they are bored. Boredom passes and often leads to creativity.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics, Health, US 2000. ² The American Academy of Pediatrics cited by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* June 21, 2001. ³ National Center for Health Statistics, 2000. *1999 National Health and Nutrition Examination*. ⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a letter to the editor of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. October 4, 2000. ⁵ *ibid.* ⁶ Coon, Katharine, Jeanne Goldberg, PhD, RD, Beatrice L Rogers, PhD, and Katherine Tucker, PhD. “Relationships Between Use of Television During Meals and Children’s Food Consumption Patterns”. *Pediatrics*. Vol. 107 No. 1. January, 2001. ⁷ Robinson, Thomas. Cited by the *New York Times*. October 19, 2000. ⁸ *Boston Globe*. The Rise of Diabetes. September 1, 2000. ⁹ *ibid.* ¹⁰ Study by Dr. Frank Hu in 1999 as reported in the *Boston Herald*. June 21, 1999.