

Wellness Articles

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Screen Time: Finding a Balance

Many families enjoy watching a favourite television show or movie together, but it is easy for children to spend too much time alone with a TV, computer, or video game. How do you know when it's time to cut back screen time?

The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends: No screen time for children under two years old, less than one hour of screen time daily for children between the ages of two and four, and less than two hours of screen time per day for older children.

Too much screen time can limit time for physical activity, reading, schoolwork, and talking with family and friends. But you can help your children develop healthy habits by monitoring screen time and teaching them to use media safely and wisely.

Keeping track of screen time

- Have a central spot in your home to keep all your devices. This will help keep track of screen time.
- Make a family TV show schedule together and post it where everyone can see it (e.g. on the fridge).
- Make sure that you all agree on the plan. For example, agree on no screens during meals so everyone knows what's OK to watch and when it's OK to watch it.

Lead by example

- When someone is talking to you, stop looking at the screen and look at the person. Encourage your children to do the same.
- When you play or read with your child, turn off the TV and other screens. Even a show playing in the background matters. It distracts you and your child from learning the most from the activities you share.

- Show your children how to lead a balanced life between screen time and other activities.
- Make screen time active—play during commercials and choose shows that get your family up and moving.

Focus on family time

- Make a list of other activities so your family doesn't rely on screens for entertainment. Include outdoor activities, playing, and reading in your family's daily routine.
- At mealtimes, put your media devices aside. Use the time to talk to each other.
- Make at least one night each week a family night. That means no screens. Play card or board games, read together, or go to an event.
- Go for a walk or bike ride as a family.
- Go to the library for a story time or to check out a book.

Use screen time to learn

- Help your child learn by watching and talking about TV shows together.
- Choose TV shows that:
 - Repeat ideas to help kids learn.
 - Pause and ask kids to join in.
 - Teach only one message at a time.

Cutting back on screen time is very difficult to do, and while you may want to cut back, this may not be a good time for you. If you cannot start now, perhaps you can think about doing it later.

Remember that you can control how fast you make any changes. Making small, gradual changes to what and how much you watch on TV and other screens will help you and your child maintain the changes. The decision to change and how you do it are up to you. You can find a way that works for your family.

When you are ready to try, your doctor can give you information and support to help.