

# Parent Communications— Tune Out the TV

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## Tune Out Your TV for Better Health!

American children watch about 3 hours of TV a day. Many watch more than that. Sound like a lot? Think about your average day. In the morning, the kids might watch an hour while eating breakfast and getting ready for school. After school, kids might watch another hour before dinner, and then another hour before bed. Three hours comes and goes pretty easily.

How is TV a problem for health?

Watching several hours of TV, combined with other recreational screen time activities each day, can lead to less physical activity, overeating, and higher risk for becoming overweight. TV watching also may influence children to make unhealthy food choices because they see a lot of advertisements for foods that are high in sugars and calories.

Here are a few quick facts on TV advertising:

- ▶ Each day, children receive about 58 commercial messages from television alone. About half of these are for food.
- ▶ Close to 98% of food commercials on weekend morning network TV are for unhealthy foods high in fat, sodium, cholesterol, or sugar.

What's a parent to do? Protect your children by setting limits.

Children over the age of 2 should watch TV, play video games, or use the computer for fun less than 2 hours each day. You can make the biggest impact by keeping television sets out of children's bedrooms and by banning TV during homework and mealtimes. Although you may get complaints at first, these limits can help you spend more time interacting as a family and can free up time to do other things like play games, read, or just be together.

Another thing you can do is help your children make appropriate choices when they do watch television. Whenever possible, watch programs with children to monitor the content, including commercials. You are far better able than they are to see the hidden messages and motivations of commercial advertisements. When it comes to food advertising, children are easily misled by commercials that promote diet foods and fast foods as nutritious choices.

And finally, set a good example by keeping your own TV viewing and other screen time in check. For helpful ideas for activities to substitute for TV time, visit [www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign) or [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov).

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Optional Sidebar:

Tips for Success

- ▶ **No TV during meal times.** Turn off the TV and talk to your children during meal times.
- ▶ **No TV sets in any bedrooms.** Keep TVs in common areas and out of kids' bedrooms.
- ▶ **No channel surfing.** Only watch favorite shows instead of finding something to watch.
- ▶ **Use technology.** Screening devices can remove commercials and limit the time kids spend watching TV. TiVo or TV Allowance are helpful tools.
- ▶ **Be a good role model.** Limit your own TV viewing. Kids will learn from you!
- ▶ **Endure kids' complaints.** This may be a parent's biggest challenge. Although it may be hard at first, limits on TV can actually help you spend more time as a family. You can free up time to do other things like play games, read, or just be together. Stick with it!
- ▶ **Help kids deal with boredom.** Be prepared to suggest other activities. Over time, kids will start to enjoy other pastimes even more!

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Optional e-mail message: Use this sample message to communicate with parents by e-mail (if available).

**Subject Line: Healthy Habits Power Tips—Tune Out the TV**

Dear (school name and grade) Parents:

This week for the Eat Well & Keep Moving program, children in the (insert school name and grade) will be encouraged to limit recreational screen time and turn off the TV as part of the (Prime-Time Smartness Challenge or Freeze My TV promotion). The key messages we'll be promoting are the following:

- ▶ Moving your body keeps you fit!
- ▶ Do something active instead of watching TV, playing video games, or spending time on the computer for fun.

Our goal is to make children aware of how much TV they watch and encourage them to trade some of that time for activities that are more positive for their bodies and minds. Setting limits on TV and other screen time (like computer and video games) can benefit your children's health. You can support this goal by reinforcing the key messages at home, and by following these Healthy Habits Power Tips:

- ▶ **Be a good role model.** Limit your own TV viewing. Your children will learn from you!
- ▶ **Limit TV and other screen time (like computers or video games) to less than 2 hours per day.** This can be done by keeping television sets out of everyone's bedrooms, limiting viewing to specific days or times, watching only favorite shows, and not allowing TV during meals or homework times.
- ▶ **Have screen-free days!** Plan family activities that do not include TV or movies. Check into local sports and recreation programs that are offered after school and on weekends. Some programs are free, and many offer scholarships. Also look at the TV Free Network website ([www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org)) for activity ideas.
- ▶ **Suggest other activities.** Help kids deal with boredom by suggesting other activities. For example, plan a family game night or suggest that kids trade 30 minutes of TV for 30 minutes of reading. Want to learn more? Visit [www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign) or [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov) for ideas on keeping kids busy without screens.

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