

## ***Eight Tips to Wean the Screen!***

By

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TV Turn-off Week is April 19-25, 2010. Televisions, video games, computers, cell phones, and portable music players' screens are everywhere these days, including our living rooms, our cars, and our pockets. Everyday kids ages 8 to 18 spend on average about four and one-half hours watching TV, more than 90 minutes on the computer, and over an hour playing video games. That totals over 7 hours a day in front of a screen!

Extensive screen time can leave kids (and adults) sleep deprived, reduce physical activity levels, and increase eating. Here are eight tips to wean the screen:

- **Have a screen test.** Determine how much time you and your family spend in front of screens such as televisions, computers, video games, and cell phones. Once you know your family's screen time, you'll be able to figure out how best to balance screen time with physical activity, household chores, and other activities.
- **Do a reality check on reality TV.** Set guidelines on the amount of screen time your children are allowed to have. Health experts recommend two hours or less a day of screen time that is not work- or homework-related. Once you set guidelines, make them a reality by enforcing them.
- **Practice what you preach.** If your kids see you following your own rules, they will be more likely to do the same. Limit your own screen use and spend more time connected to your family. You are a much more important role model for your children than a TV superhero.
- **Meal appeal.** Set rules for no TV, texting, or games during meal time. If you have a TV where you eat family meals, consider removing it. Meal time offers a great opportunity to reconnect each day. Research shows families that eat together eat more nutritious meals than families who eat separately.
- **Get lean in front of the screen.** Turn TV time into fit time. Position hand weights, fit balls, yoga mats and other fitness equipment near your television(s). Stretch, do biceps curls or have a push-up contest with your family while watching TV. Or pop in an exercise video, DVD, or game to get everyone's heart rate up.
- **Snack attack.** It's easy to mindlessly eat while watching TV or working at a computer. Keep healthy foods on hand, like fresh fruits and vegetables for those urges to eat.
- **Prevent bed head.** If your child has a television in their bedroom, remove it. Children with TVs in their rooms tend to be more physically isolated.
- **Get physical.** Children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Brainstorm ideas with your family on activities to do together for fun. Examples include going for a walk or hike, engaging in household activities like washing the car or

gardening, or visiting local sites such as a museum or zoo. Visit your local public library to check out a book to read; read a book aloud to your younger sister or brother. It may take a lot of effort on your part to wean yourself and your family from the screen, but it will be worth it. The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents to limit screen activities to one to two hours a day for kids older than two years old and no screen activities for kids younger than 2 years old. Go ahead and challenge yourself and your family to spend less time in front of the screen! You will be glad you did! For more information call the Hardee County Extension Office at 863-773-2164. (Source: National Heart Lung and Blood Institute Health e-Action newsletter, January 2010 edition.