



From the time my children were born, I've relied on electronic babysitters. I remember placing my infant in front of our big screen television to serve as a distraction while I made a much-needed pot of coffee every morning. As she grew, my electronic babysitter options grew as well. By the time she was a toddler, running around getting into toddler things, I could always rely on an iPad to give me at least five to seven minutes of uninterrupted shower time. Long drive ahead of us? No problem – cars come with televisions built into seats! Or, in our case, a portable option for her viewing pleasure.

There is no doubt that our current societal norm is to plop our children in front of a screen as soon as possible. And who can blame us? Between work obligations, cooking and the housework that goes into managing a family, what other options do we have?

I recall being in my pediatrician's office and seeing the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) recommendations for child media use. One of the recommendations was for children less than two years of age to have zero screen time, at which I laughed. For additional AAP recommendations, please see below.

American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) Screen Time Recommendations for Children



In what world could that be possible? Was the AAP going to provide a nanny and chef for me? Those recommendations have been echoing in the back of my mind for years, though I never heeded much thought to actually following the advice.

Well, my first child is now 11 years old, and as life would have it, I now belong to a beautiful blended family of five young ladies. Their ages range from nine to 14, and true to form, they are all unique individuals with different interests and needs. Our household can be loud, fun, dramatic, chaotic, disorganized and loud (*yes, I know I stated that already*). One of the most frequent offenders to the volume in our home comes from screens.

The other day, as I was in the kitchen, I noticed something. One child (*whose name will remain anonymous to protect the innocent*) was performing an act I'd never seen before and wouldn't have imagined was possible. She had not one, not two, but three screens in front of her at the same time. She was sitting on the couch binge watching a show on Netflix, while playing a YouTube clip from one of her favorite YouTube stars and texting. It made me pause and think. Do we need to finally abide by the screen time rules? Do those rules need to be expanded to include no more than one screen at a time? Where will this end? Later that day, Nick and I discussed my screen time concerns and decided to make some changes.

Health and wellness are important to both of us, as I am a dietitian and he has a background in personal training and coaching. We talked to the girls about mindfulness – about being present each moment of every day and the importance of doing one thing at a time. We also went beyond this and had a discussion about increasing our activity levels as a family.

We had a family meeting and came up with some ideas to put down our screens (*we are just as guilty of it as they are*) and get outside! We placed a chart on our fridge and started tracking our screen time as well as outside time. We came up with a list of ideas of things to do outside as a family, or individually. Nick even designed a fun circuit workout we could do at the park together (See page 42). Each member of the family set their own personal goal for limiting screens and changing habits.

What I've found that works best for us is making a game out of things. It adds an element of fun to any task we are trying to accomplish. Here are some other ideas from the WeCan[®] (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition) program which is a collaboration between the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) – all aimed to help improve the health of children and families in the Unites States.



Here are some of their ideas:

Log Screen Time vs. Active Time

By logging a weeks' worth of screen time and active time, you will have a better understanding of how much time is being spent on each activity. Then, you can make changes according to your goals.

Make Screen Time Active Time

During commercial breaks, perform some type of physical movement. You can write down ideas on index cards and place them in a bucket or bowl to keep near the television. Every time a commercial comes on, pull out one of the cards and perform the activity listed. Samples include squats, lunges, push-ups, stretching, balancing on one leg, jumping jacks, etc.



Create Screen-free Bedrooms

Research has shown that children who have televisions in their bedroom watch an average of 90 minutes more of it per day than those who do not.

Provide Other Options

Have a list of activities ready to go in plain sight for your children. When they ask if they can have screen time (*and you've decided it's not time for that*), point to the list and have them choose another activity instead. Ideas include going on a scooter ride, going on a rock hunt outside, playing with playdoh, etc.





Active Time

Screen Time

BALANCE

ON

ONF

FOOT

EXERCISE

CARDS

Understand Television Ads

Unfortunately, commercial ads affect all of us. When we see snacks or beverages on the television, it turns on signals in our brain that stimulate appetite or the desire to eat. Combine this with targeted ads to children by having a cartoon or sports character acting as a mascot, and you can have a strong desire to want whatever product is being advertised. Out of sight, out of mind can be true for many things, including the drive to eat. Limiting commercial viewing may help with decreasing the desire to snack in front of the television.

If you would like additional resources including free print-outs of screen time charts, parent tips and handbooks and many other beneficial tools, please visit:

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/ wecan/tools-resources/tools-reducescreen-time.htm

Here are Some Other Thoughts to Consider:

What is Screen Time?

This is a term used for activities done in front of a screen, including: watching television, working on a computer, playing a video game or playing on a smart phone or tablet.

What's the Big Deal about Screen Time?

Screen time increases sedentary time. This means that when you sit in front of a screen, you are physically inactive. For children and adults, this can contribute to poorer health. Too much screen time has also been linked to:

- Poor sleeping habits
- Raising the risk for attention problems
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Increased risk for obesity



FAMILY WORKOUT

by Nick Mendez, CF-L1

Taking the whole family outside offers us quality time away from digital distractions. The nearby park provides endless opportunities for outdoor activities and creative workouts. It's hard not to have fun when you combine sunshine, high fives and exercise, right? Bring a watch or smartphone to use as a timer for this 15-minute workout:



Station 1 – Lower body

Spend one minute doing as many repetitions as possible of your favorite leg exercise. Options include stepping up to the seat of a park bench, then back down with alternating legs; doing lunges in the grass to a depth your knees allow; or simply sitting down on the park bench and then standing back up quickly. Maintain safe positions at all times while giving yourself a personal challenge for one minute. Then switch to the next station.

Station 2 – Upper body

favorite chest movement. One option is the push-up, which you

can do in the traditional position on the sidewalk if strength allows.

Or adjust to your comfort level by placing your hands (a) on the seat

wall while standing a couple feet away. Putting your body in a more

vertical position allows you to adjust the push-up resistance to



Station 3 – Move

your comfort level.

Spend two minutes simply moving your body. This could be a run around the park, a brisk walk to the light pole and back or a scooter ride around the basketball court. Let each family member be creative.

Rest for one minute, and then repeat these three stations for a total of three rounds.

Current Screen Time Statistics:

Research estimates that children ages eight to 18 spend the following amount of time on screens each day:

- 7.5 hours using entertainment media
- 4.5 hours watching television
- 1.5 hours on the computer
- > 1 hour playing video games
- < 25 minutes reading a book

Screen time increases sedentary time. This means that when you sit in front of a screen, you are physically inactive. For children and adults, this can contribute to poorer health.

Ways to Decrease Screen Time:

- Remove televisions from the bedroom
- Do not allow television-watching during meal time or homework
- Do not allow children to eat while watching television or using the computer (*this encourages mindless eating which can lead to consuming more food than needed*)
- Do not leave the television on for background noise; play the radio instead
- Be a good role model; decrease all family members' screen time to two hours or less per day
- Create a family challenge (*make it a game!*): See if you can go one day or one week without watching television

About the Authors:

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Nick Mendez, CF-L1, has coached kids, teens and adults of all abilities for the past five years from a gym he's owned and operated in Gilbert, Arizona. He combines his certifications in functional fitness, weightlifting and rowing to create diverse workouts for himself and others, while promoting a balance in nutrition and exercise. He enjoys spending his free time running, reading and creating fun family activities for all to enjoy.

OAC **Obesity Action Coalition**

ABOUT THE **OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)**

ANNUAL CONVENTION

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its **YOUR WEIGHT** treatments, and fight to eliminate weight NATIONAL bias and discrimination. AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS





/IBRAN1 COMMUNITY

ADVOCACY

PUBLIC EDUCATION

ITY ACTIO

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs

Community Discussion Forum

 Ongoing Support
Meaningful Connections AND MUCH MORE

JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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