

## **How Does Excessive Screen Time Really Affect Kids?**

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Notice how many kids these days have access to electronics. What impact does early exposure of electronics have on children? Usually, children have a set amount of screen time on their devices, like a couple hours for example. On the other hand, some parents do not have a set amount of time on their devices and let their kids use an electronic at any time desired. I understand why some parents may need a break from their children after coming back from work, then cooking and cleaning up after them seems very exhausting, although this can lead to bad early childhood development and unhealthy habits learned at an immature age that will affect them later as they grow older. I believe that it is crucial that children at this age are not allowed too much screen time because they are still young, and their brains are still developing. The truth about bad screen time habits is that it leads to poor sleep, depression, obesity, anxiety, and prevented learning.

One of the most crucial factors for child development is sleep. It is often said that excessive screen time leads to poor sleep and having a harder time going to sleep due to the blue light. Blue light interferes with someone's sleep-wake cycle, in other words blue light interferes with your brain telling you when it is time to go to sleep. I agree with this claim because although I am not a child, this applies to everyone no matter what age, I can say from personal experience that it is harder to fall asleep after hours of screen time beforehand. After reading an article from *Sleep Foundation*, Jay Summer and Dr. Nilong Vyas (2023) write, "Sleep is crucial for children in school and excessive screen time can lead to symptoms of insomnia, difficulty staying asleep, and a lack of focus the next day. Parents should set limits on screen time, led by example, and communicate with their children about the importance of sleep." Jay Summer and Dr. Nilong Vyas (2023) also write "A research study found that evening light exposure suppressed melatonin twice as much in children compared to adults. A child's age and

developmental stage may also determine the impact. Researchers found that children who had not yet gone through puberty experienced significantly more melatonin suppression in response to evening light compared with post-puberty adolescents.” Jay Summer and Dr. Nilong Vyas (2023) give us an explanation of how blue light affects melatonin:

Blue light suppresses the production of melatonin, a hormone that promotes feelings of sleepiness. Humans evolved to maintain a sleep-wake cycle based around the rising and setting of the sun. When we only receive natural sunlight, our melatonin levels are low during the day, but they start to rise after sunset. They reach their highest point in the middle of the night and then slowly decrease until morning. Exposure to blue light during the day from sunlight or other sources is a healthy promoter of energy and concentration. Daytime blue light exposure has also been shown to improve sleep quality Trusted Source National Library of Medicine, Biotech Information the National Center for Biotechnology Information advances science and health by providing access to biomedical and genomic information. View Source and duration. However, using devices that produce artificial blue light in the evening and nighttime disrupts our natural sleep-wake cycle by tricking the brain into not producing melatonin before bed. This causes us to feel less sleepy than we should at bedtime.

Many people think that letting their child use an electronic for longer than recommended is not that bad for them as it is a way for their child to calm down or relax. Little do they know that excessive screen time can lead to depression in kids. After reviewing an article from MCHC Health Centers (2018) writes:

Rising rates of depression and anxiety in children are complexly correlated with excessive screen time. Because of the 24/7 availability of screens and social media,

children have fewer opportunities to take a mental break from society and for their mind to have rest and quiet. Kids have less time to think, to process, to reflect. Furthermore, kids are spending more time on impersonal social media “relationships” than physically spending time with others. A recent study by UCLA found that excessive screen time can inhibit children’s ability to recognize emotions. It decreases face to face interaction and increases exposure to cyberbullying, which can lead to feelings of isolation and low self esteem.

This article informs us that depression is a common factor of excessive screen time because of its “24/7 availability” and access to social media. It seems to be that social media has a negative impact on kids lives since they may compare their life to someone else's life. I can say that I used to compare my life to others, but not in a bad way but more of a lifestyle way. I used to observe what they did to make themselves a better version of themselves. So instead of comparing my life and theirs in a bad way, for example seeing what they have that I do not, I would see how I can benefit and learn from their lifestyle.

Some may say that excessive screen time is bad for your eyes and can damage them. Although excessive screen time does affect your eyes by making them discomfort, strained, and can give you headaches, but it will not make you go blind. I say that if anyone ever experiences any of these problems caused by too much screen time, you should simply give yourself a break from your device. In the article “Is Too Much Screen Time Really Bad for Our Eyes” from UPMC HEALTH BEAT, UPMC (2023) writes that our eyes get very tired from long usage of looking at a screen. They also inform us that we tend to blink less while looking at a screen and this causes dry eyes. They also tell us that “should avoid dry eye because it can impact the health of your eye and cause blurry vision.” They point out that looking at a screen is typically indoors and that may encroach on a child's eye development as in natural daylight helps their eyes

develop. "Studies have shown children who spend more time indoors are more likely to develop nearsightedness." The article informs us about the down sides of excessive screen time not only for kids but for people of all ages and most importantly informs us that too much screen time does not make us no blind but will cause your vision to get worst and have a harder time focusing on objects closer or further away from you. They also inform us that a child's eye development is negatively impacted by the child staying inside and looking at a screen. They share that for good eye development, natural daylight helps a child's eyes develop.

It is often said that excessive screen time often leads to obesity. Most of the time electronic use is indoors and usually is used while not moving much, thus much physical activity is not happening. I agree that excessive screen time leads to weight gain, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe health is important. In the article from University of California San Francisco, Jess Berthold (2022) writes "They are also more likely to compare themselves to unrealistic body ideals, which can develop into an eating disorder. Binge watching shows can lead to binge eating, resulting in weight gain and guilt." Another source from World Cancer Research Fund International, Emily Almond (2018) writes "When using screens, we are typically inactive and use up little energy. This displaces time that could be spent being more physically active. Being inactive can disrupt our normal appetite signaling and lead to passively eating more than is needed." This not only goes for children but for anyone. Jess Berthold (2022) informs us that comparison with physiques online may lead to eating disorders since they are trying to get the same or similar physique with the person, they are comparing themselves to. She also tells us that binge watching movies and shows leads to binge eating because what do you do when you watch anything, you also eat, so it only makes sense that you binge eat while binge watching. Electronics take truly little energy and instead of a child spending their time doing physical

activity, their time is used on an electronic making them not so active. That affects their appetite and may lead them to eating more than they should.

Another common myth about screen time is that it is very addictive. An article from Jhon Hopkins Medicine, Jennifer Katzenstein writes “There is also some data to suggest that use of devices reinforces dopamine pathways, a neurotransmitter that is a “feel good” chemical involved in our reward-seeking behaviors. When this pathway is not reinforced, we experience chemical withdrawal in our brains.” I agree that screen time is addictive because my experience using electronics confirms it. I can say from personal experience that playing video games or scrolling on social media is very addictive and is that I do in my free time. An article from Lemonade writes:

Each time you did something that prompted the release of dopamine, your brain started to notice a pattern. Soon enough, your brain began to associate ‘cell phone’ with dopamine.’ And since your brain naturally craves easy hits of dopamine, it started to crave your phone. When you perform a specific behavior over and over again that triggers a certain reward, the pattern becomes etched into your neural pathways. Soon enough, your brain begins to crave that reward regularly. And here’s the thing about dopamine: it quickly metabolizes in your brain, leaving you wanting more and more, as soon as possible. So once the impact of the dopamine goes away, your brain will do whatever it takes to get that feeling back, as soon as it can.

This article explains why screen time is addictive because it informs us that we tend to do the things that give us dopamine, and once we notice what gives us dopamine, we do it repeatedly. Electronics give us lots of dopamine depending on the person.

During Covid is where I would say I got really into gaming and spending a lot of time on electronics since everything was online due to the pandemic. That was a big turning point in my life, and without the pandemic I would say my life would be vastly different. I still play video games every now and then when I have time, but I feel like a big part of my teenage life was taken away from me since everyone had to stay inside all the time. Therefore, I made a big investment and bought a PC to do school on. That is what I told my parents, but I wanted a better system to play video games on if I am being honest. On average I would spend around 8 hours on my PC and 4 on my phone. Although technology is the future of this world, we should be informed of the cautions of the effects of the use of screen time.

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