



Kids getting more screen time?

Enjoy with limits.

A screen may be a child's distraction, but to young eyes it can be a disturbance.

Children begin carrying digital devices from the moment their dimpled fingers can hold them. In fact, children under age 8 on average now spend more than 2 hours a day with screen media.¹

While the experience may make them tech-savvy and dexterous, the screen effects of video games, cell phones, tablets, computers and televisions can affect kids' vision and their overall health, research shows.

That does not mean children have to completely power down, though. Parents can manage exposure with a few changes of habit, and protection.

Why so blue?

Blue light, part of the light spectrum that is visible to the human eye, provides basic illumination and can also enhance feelings of well-being.² This may explain why children are so easily drawn to the glow of their handheld devices.

But the effects of blue light on vision can be wide ranging, depending on the length of a kid's screen time. This is because their maturing eyes haven't yet developed the protective pigments to help filter out some of the damaging light that comes from all that time in front of the screen.³

Too much screen time can also put strain on the eyes and may be linked to blurred vision, dry eye and headaches,⁴ and can lead to interrupted sleep by suppressing the release of melatonin (the hormone that tells us when it's time to sleep). And an extended lack of deep sleep can in turn contribute to behavioral issues and weight gain due to overeating.⁵

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Protect kids' eyes

One of the easiest way to protect a child's eyes from the effects of overexposure is to call time out on their electronic devices. Put at least an hour between screen time and bedtime, some doctors suggest.⁴ In the interim, you could encourage the child to read a book.

Lastly, you can opt for eye protection designed to help reduce eye strain caused by devices. Ask your eye doctor what options may be right for you and your child.

Standing between a child and their device won't always be easy, but by developing some of these practices early the child will adjust. And who knows? Maybe they will be just as happy reading a book.

You also can dim the screens of all devices, which should limit the amount of blue light coming through.

One hour
Amount of time
doctors recommend
between screen time
and bedtime.⁴

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¹"More Than 33 Percent of Kids Under Two Use Tablets So Prepare for an Army of Robot Babies," by Noah Rayman, Time, Oct. 28, 2013

<http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/10/28/more-than-33-percent-ofkids-under-two-are-using-tablets-so-prepare-for-an-army-ofrobot-babies/>

²"Effects of Blue Light Exposure on Your Eyes," by Troy Bedinghaus, OD, www.verywellhealth.com/blue-light-exposure-3421985. Accessed December 2019.

³"Ultraviolet A, Blue Light and Children," by Elaine Kitchel, Low Vision Research Associate, www.tsbvi.edu/seehear/fall99/ultraviolet.htm

⁴"Why Electronics May Stimulate You Before Bed," National Sleep Foundation, <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/why-electronics-may-stimulate-you-bed>. Accessed December 2019.

⁵"Doctor: Blue Light From Electronics Can Wreak Havoc On Children's Sleep," CBS Minnesota, by Angela Davis, Dec. 15, 2014, <http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2014/09/15/doctor-blue-light-from-electronics-can-wreak-havoc-on-childrens-sleep>

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