

[IMAGE]

Watching Our Children Get Fat

At the Children's Television Conference in 1996, President Bill Clinton underscored America's obsession with television when he noted that "a typical child watches 25,000 hours of television before his or her 18th birthday. Preschoolers watch 28 hours of television a week." If you tend to shrug off this fascination with the tube as harmless, consider a recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that examined the potential connection between TV viewing and obesity.

Nearly 200 third and fourth-grade students from two public elementary schools participated in the study, in which children from one school received an 18-lesson, six-month classroom curriculum to reduce television, videotape and video game use. The intervention was based solely upon teaching the children to budget their entertainment time and did not include other lifestyle modifications such as exercise. The second school received no curriculum to modify TV viewing and was compared with the initial group after six months.

Children from the first school showed significant decreases in body-mass index, triceps skinfold thickness, waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratio following the six-month educational program, especially compared to the second school that received no intervention to decrease TV viewing. Children from the first school also reported significant decreases in overall television viewing and meals eaten in front of the television.

These findings add to considerable evidence suggesting that television can influence our children, and the news isn't good. As parents, let's take the opportunity to do something about it. It's time to stop watching our children get fat.

Reference:

Robinson TN. Reducing children's television viewing to prevent obesity. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Oct. 27, 1999: Vol. 282, No. 16, pp1561-67.

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