

[IMAGE]

Bad for Body Image

By Editorial Staff

We've talked a great deal in *To Your Health* about the risks associated with excessive smartphone use; everything from poor posture to a higher risk of anxiety / depression. Now let's turn the conversation to body image and how phones are making our children more likely to want – and try to achieve – the "perfect body" they see on their screens, leading to unhealthy weight-loss efforts.

Yes, smartphone use has become ubiquitous, and so has poor body image regarding weight. Is there a connection? Researchers have found one. A new study collected data on smartphone use (minutes per day) and types of content most frequently viewed: "(educational or informational searches; chatting, messaging, or email; social networking services or forums; games; videos, movies, or music; webtoons or web novels; and shopping or other activities)." The study group: more than 50,000 adolescents ages 12-18; essentially half girls and half boys.

After also gathering data on height / weight, the study defined an adolescent with body-image distortion as considering themselves normal weight, fat or very fat, even when underweight; perceiving themselves as fat or very fat, even when normal weight; or perceiving themselves as very fat when only overweight.

Smartphone use of at least 301 minutes / day (five hours) was associated with body-image distortion and inappropriate weight-loss strategies in both boys and girls compared with low smartphone use [fewer than 120 minutes / day (two hours)]. The type of content accessed also made a difference: "using smartphones mainly for interaction-focused content, such as social networking services, forums, chatting, and messaging, was more closely associated with weight loss behaviors compared with other content types."

smartphone use - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark What are "inappropriate weight-loss strategies"?

Per the study, we're talking about skipping meals for 24 hours or longer, eating only one food item consistently, inducing vomiting after eating, using laxatives or diuretics, and using weight-loss medications without a prescription. Definitely not healthy weight-loss strategies; if any strategy was needed in the first place.

The moral to the story: Monitor how much time your children spend on their phones; *and* the type of content they view, especially if you notice changes in their personality with regard to body image, weight or anything else.

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