**WARNING: Too Much TV is Hazardous to Your Health**

“Children whose movements are limited because they’re spending their time in front of computers or televisions . . . are at risk of never fulfilling their potential.”

—Pete Egoscue, Exercise Physiologist

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**Fast Facts**

- Americans watch an average of more than four hours of TV a day, or two full months of TV a year. 
- 40% of families always or often watch TV while eating dinner.
- Only 14% of 12th-graders who watch TV six hours a day or more achieve proficiency on reading tests, whereas 52% of students who watch an hour or less do.
- By age 18, American children will have seen an average of more than 200,000 acts of violence, including 16,000 murders on TV.
- Virtually all 3,500 research studies over 40 years show a link between watching media violence and committing acts of real violence.
- The proportion of overweight children has doubled since 1980 due, in part, to sedentary leisure time activities such as watching TV.

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More than four hours a day: that’s how much television Americans watch on average. Watching TV is our most popular pastime, and it seems that we spend about as much time talking about it as we do watching. But what we don’t talk about so much is how all that time in front of the television affects us as individuals and as a society.

As an abundance of evidence makes clear, our television habit has serious negative consequences. Excessive TV-watching cuts into family time, harms our kids’ ability to read and perform well in school, encourages violence, and promotes sedentary lifestyles and obesity.

**TV Undermines Family Time**

Many people feel that they do not have enough time to spend with their families. In fact, according to a *Newsweek* poll, even 73 percent of teens would like to spend more time with their parents.

Although often overlooked, television plays a crucial role. In the average American household, the TV is on for 7 hours, 40 minutes a day, and 40 percent of Americans report always or often watching television while eating dinner. What’s more, most family members watch different programs in separate rooms.

Families who watch little or no television, on the other hand, often find that they have more time to spend with one another in more engaging and interactive activities.

**TV Harms Reading and Academic Performance**

Excessive television-watching harms reading skills both by displacing them from our daily lives and, according to some experts, by affecting the physical structure of the brain.

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Researchers have found that students who watch more than four hours of TV a day have lower reading scores than those who watch less. In a study conducted by Susan B. Neuman of the University of Lowell, students who watched more than four hours of TV a day had lower reading scores than those who watched an hour or less. Only 27 percent of students who watched four to five hours of TV a day read proficiently, whereas 52 percent of students who watched an hour or less did.

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RealVision, an initiative to raise awareness about the impact of television, is a project of TV-Turnoff Network, 1200 29th Street, NW, LL #1, Washington, DC 20007

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Moreover, researchers such as Jane Healy of Harvard argue that watching TV instead of reading may actually influence the physical structure of the brain as it develops, making learning and working in the schoolroom environment difficult.6

TV Encourages Violence—“The debate is over”7
The evidence is overwhelming: violence on TV promotes violent behavior in real life. Of more than 3,500 research studies on the effects of media violence over the past 40 years, 99.5 percent have shown a positive correlation between watching violence on TV and committing acts of real-life violence.8 Watching violent TV at age eight was the strongest predictor of aggression later in life—stronger even than violent behavior as children, according to Dr. Leonard Eron’s 32-year study.9

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Television’s lesson is an enduring one. According to Dr. Leonard D. Eron’s 32-year study, watching television violence at age 8 was the strongest predictor of aggression later in life—stronger even than violent behavior as children. The more violent television the subjects watched at age 8, the more serious was their aggressive behavior 22 years later, at age 30.9

In addition to promoting violence, TV also desensitizes viewers to real-life violence and distorts viewers’ perceptions of how dangerous the world really is. Television violence dulls the emotional response to violence and its victims.10

TV Promotes Sedentary Lifestyles and Obesity
Americans, by and large, do not get enough physical exercise.11 We spend most of our free time watching television, which promotes obesity and its related illnesses. According to Dr. William Dietz, Director of the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Centers for Disease Control, “The easiest way to reduce inactivity is to turn off the TV set. Almost anything else uses more energy than watching TV.”

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The prevalence of obesity among adults and children is increasing. The Centers for Disease Control report that 27 percent of adults are obese nationwide and that obesity and its attendant health risks account for an estimated 300,000 deaths a year.12,13 The proportion of young children who are obese jumped from just over 4 percent in 1965 to over 15 percent in 2003.14 Childhood obesity is a leading factor in the unprecedented rise of Type II (“adult-onset”) diabetes among adolescents.15

What’s more, sedentary children risk suffering from other ailments later in life, including chronic pain, heart disease, dizziness, and migraines—as Pete Egoscue has put it, “Children whose movements are limited because they’re spending their time in front of computers or televisions . . . are at risk of never fulfilling their potential.”16