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Glued To The Tube?

Too much TV can be hazardous to your health

What's the most dangerous object in your house? The usual list of culprits includes items such as kitchen knives, wobbly stepladders, and slippery steps. Now researchers have added something that may surprise you: television.

New research suggests that spending too much time glued to the TV may be hazardous to your health.

The more time people spend watching TV, the more likely they are to be overweight or obese and to have early signs of heart disease and diabetes, as well as a higher than average risk of having metabolic syndrome. Metabolic syndrome is a dangerous combination of high blood pressure, abdominal fat, insulin resistance, and abnormal cholesterol levels.

Too much time spent in front of the tube could double your risk of developing these dangerous risk factors. A recent study that followed 6241 men and women found that women who watched 14 or more hours of television per week doubled their risk of having metabolic syndrome compared to women who watched 7 hours or less. Among men, heavy TV watchers increased their risk by 50 percent.

Scientists are particularly worried about children, whose



rates of obesity and early signs of diabetes are rising dramatically. In a study of girls between the ages of 7 and 11, those who watched the most TV were 13 times more likely to become overweight than those who watched the least. The same troubling pattern shows up around the world, in kids and adults alike. In fact, television viewing was far more strongly related to excess weight than what people ate.

Mindless Eating

How can this be? One explanation is that time spent watching television is time spent *not* being physically active. And the less active you are, the fewer calories your body burns. If you consume more calories than you burn, you'll put on weight. It's that simple.

But being sedentary appears to be only one of the dangers of too much television. Several recent studies show that even

when people's levels of physical activity are the same, those who watch a lot of television are more likely to be overweight and have more risk factors for heart disease and diabetes than those who watch less. One explanation is that TV viewing itself is associated with excess snacking. The more television people watch, the more likely they are to load up on calorie-dense junk food like chips, cookies, candy, and soda.

That's hardly surprising—many of the ads on television promote soft drinks, chips, cookies, and other high calorie foods. In a survey of Saturday morning TV programming, researchers counted 202 advertisements for sugary cereals, soft drinks, candy, and other junk food. That's 8 commercials tempting you to eat something sweet for every 10 minutes of programming.

Many families sit down to their main meals in front of the TV. Unfortunately, those meals are often less healthy than meals consumed when the family gathers around the kitchen table without television. Meals eaten in front of the television average fewer fruits and vegetables than those eaten when the TV is off.

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Eating and watching TV may also encourage overeating. One of the problems with eating in front of the television is that it tends to be mindless eating. People consume calories without even being aware they're eating.

Metabolic Syndrome

Putting on pounds isn't the only hazard, and kids aren't the only ones at risk. In a 2007 study, researchers found that the more time a group of volunteers over age 60 spent watching television, the higher their risk of being overweight and having signs of metabolic syndrome. For every additional hour of TV watched each day, the risk climbed more than 19 percent.

One of the most worrisome symptoms of metabolic syndrome is insulin resistance, an early warning sign for diabetes. There appears to be a strong link between TV viewing and impaired insulin responses.

Healthier and Happier

These alarms come at a time when people in many parts of the world are spending more time staring at the tube. The latest statistics are mind numbing. In the U.S., according to the latest numbers from ACNielsen, televisions are now turned on an average of eight hours a day in the typical home. Americans now average more than four hours a day watching television.

By turning off the TV, you may find that you're both healthier and happier. A 1999 study at Stanford University School of Medicine found that when families were counseled to watch less television, children were less likely to gain excess weight. Children who watched less television were also less aggressive in their behaviour. Many families have decided to pull the plug on television, and say they're glad they did.

Switching to a Different Channel

Of course TV can be entertaining and informative. But too much of a good thing can be bad for you. Here are some strategies to help you keep your viewing pleasure to a healthy level:

- ◆ Set a limit of no more than 1 to 2 hours a day. Many of the health dangers of TV viewing show up when you watch more than 2 hours of programming.
- ◆ Choose in advance what shows you want to watch. Limit your viewing time to those programs.
- ◆ Use commercial breaks to get up, stretch, and even do a few simple exercises.
- ◆ Actively seek out other ways to spend your time. Listen to music, read, talk to friends or family, or take a walk, for example.
- ◆ Turn off the TV during dinner. Avoid snacking in front of the television.
- ◆ Tell your family and friends that you've decided to spend less time watching TV. Their support can help you stick with your healthy decision.



A Career Killer Called Stress

Scott Martyn wanted to do it all. But the stress of trying was making it impossible for the lawyer to get anything done well. As a result, not only was his physical and emotional health suffering, but his career progress was seriously stalled.

"I was feeling out of control and overwhelmed," Mr. Martyn recalls. "I was always thinking about all my problems and why I wasn't more effective. And because of that I could never get ahead.

All that obsessing also ended up straining his relationships at work. "I wanted to be more of a contributor, but, in my mind, I felt powerless to do anything more because it was all I could manage to keep from slipping further behind," Mr. Martyn recalls.

The stress also led to constant fatigue, lost sleep and, eventually, an attack of pneumonia. As he lay flat on his back recovering, he realized he had not only been taking on too much responsibility but it was in areas that didn't come naturally to him. That led to his struggle, the feeling of being out of control and underachieving.

It was time to rethink his approach and tackle the stress that was limiting his career. That's a hard lesson, but one that nobody should wait to have a health crises to learn, the experts warn.

"Almost one in four Canadians believes stress has kept them from moving ahead at work."

While we've all long heard about the effects of stress on our physical and emotional well-being, a new study shows it can not only make work difficult and less satisfying, it can also literally impede a career.

The poll found that 22 percent of Canadians believes stress has kept them from moving ahead in their organization, and 30 percent say it has prevented them from being recognized for their contribution at work.

Among the factors behind those numbers: 56 percent of the office workers surveyed said they feel that stress regularly prevents them from being as productive as they would like; 52 percent said it negatively affects their relationships with co-workers; and 51 percent said it cuts down their decision making ability.

Overall, 82 percent of respondents said they experience stress in their work and home life, and 41 percent said it is frequent.

This leads to a wide range of career-dampening problems:

- ◆ **Physical symptoms:** Respondents blamed regular headaches, indigestion, constipation, fatigue and insomnia on stress.
- ◆ **Psychological problems:** Anxiety, defensiveness, irritability or anger toward co-workers or family and feelings of being helpless were also blamed on stress.
- ◆ **Behavioural traits:** Impatience, procrastination, temper, withdrawal or a reluctance to take on more responsibility came with the stress territory.

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However, all does not have to be lost to stress. Career experts say that if you get more in tune with your natural inclinations of style and approach to work, your job will naturally become less stressful for you—and that will clear a path for advancement.

If individuals can deal with the world around them on their own terms, it reduces the underlying cause of stress and they have a better chance of experiencing career success. Modern workplaces can stifle employees' abilities to use their innate ways of analyzing situations, making decisions and dealing with others—traits that fall under what has become known as “emotional intelligence”.

This can leave people feeling they are playing someone else's game, in which they are unable to find a winning strategy. Because of this they feel trapped and out of control; stress rises as they struggle to cope.

The key to stress reduction is to control as much as you can about your work—and you have more control than you think. Following are some tips for making your work better match your natural work style, and reduce the stress that can block your career:

- ◆ **Carry what you can.** Negotiate a reasonable workload so that, at the end of the day, you can feel a sense of accomplishment, rather than a feeling of being overwhelmed.
- ◆ **Find your purpose.** Take a bigger picture view of your job's importance. There are creative ways to build purpose into your job. Think about its impact on others.
- ◆ **Be self supportive.** Self esteem comes from self validation. Be conscious of the need to think positively, compliment yourself on achievements and affirm your goals. Take care of your health, as well.
- ◆ **Be empathetic.** Find a best friend at work. Having someone with whom to discuss a stressful situation helps relieve its impact.
- ◆ **Encourage face time.** People can lose a sense of shared purpose because much of what they do in modern work is on computers rather than face to face.
- ◆ **Make personal time.** When your life is out of whack at work, you may take problems home. Make sure you give yourself the benefit of some personal time at the end of the day to unwind.



How to Manage Sibling Rivalry

It is human nature to feel competitive and envious towards others. A moderate spirit of competition is a positive and productive attribute in school and in business. Sibling rivalry is a normal part of growing up in families. The competition between siblings starts when the second child is born. Unfortunately, many parents ignore it and some even make the situation worse.

When occasional fighting becomes a constant series of arguments and fights, it must be dealt with to avoid years of discord and even potential danger. Following are some tips to help lessen parent's frustration over argumentative brothers and sisters and help them learn to get along better.

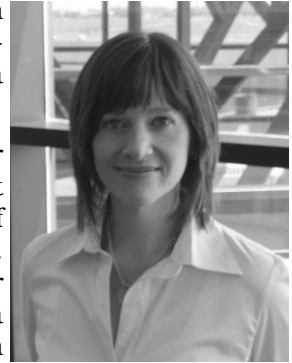
- Do your best to offer each of your children equal amounts of praise and attention. This is true if they are competing for your attention or if they are participating in a school or sports activity.
- Encourage your children to participate in activities that they truly enjoy. Don't expect them to always join activities that they must do together or where they will be competing against each other.
- Children sometimes perceive that their parents favor one child over the others. While some parents do prefer one child to the others, it is usually not a conscious choice. If your child tells you that you favor his/her sibling, pay attention to your behaviour; maybe there is some truth to it.
- Sometimes one child is more cooperative or better behaved than another. It's normal to compare siblings, but it's generally better not to talk about it. Comparing two siblings can intensify their sense of envy and jealousy. Avoid telling one child that his/her sibling does something better.
- Make it a rule that family members may become involved in incidents between siblings only if they actually saw what happened. This keeps people from being manipulated.
- Realize that younger children can be the aggressors. Don't automatically rush to their defense.
- If two kids are fighting over a toy, take it away. This discourages them from arguing over who can play with what.
- When you give things to children, base your choices on their individual needs and interests. If you try to avoid arguments by giving equal gifts to each child, they will inevitably find something about them that is unfair.





New Associate

Please join FAC in welcoming our newest associate, Terra Taylor.



Terra received her Master Degree at the University of Lethbridge in 2004. She received her registration as a Psychologist in 2006. Terra is also trained in mediation.

Terra began her counselling and assessment career in Lethbridge, Alberta. She had worked as a Psychologist at the University of Lethbridge Counselling Services since 2003. She also administered Psycho-educational Assessments for the Holy Spirit School Division as well as for a Private Practice Psychologist.

Terra enjoys a number of activities in addition to her work. She volunteered for community organizations in Lethbridge, enjoys practicing yoga, snowboarding, traveling, painting and taking cooking classes.

This fall 2007 Terra moved to Calgary and joined Fong Ailon Canniff. Her practice is now focused on Counselling, Assessment and Mediation. Terra is committed to her clients, FAC and her new community.

SUGGESTIONS/COMMENTS?

Do you have any suggestions for future articles, or just a comment regarding this newsletter?

We welcome your feedback. Please contact Wanda Mueller at 266-2017 or at wmueller@worldpsych.ca.

- When your children are in an argument, avoid taking sides. If you can, encourage them to work out their differences. It is almost impossible to try to determine who started a fight. Even if you know who started the argument, taking sides only makes things worse. If your children learn that you will not enter minor disagreements, they will have to learn to settle things between themselves.
- Take a parent education course. As you educate yourself about parenting, you will change some of your attitudes toward your children and learn new ways to interact with them. You may think that rivalry will stop magically if only you learn to do the right thing. However, learning new behaviours takes a lot of time and persistence.
- It is important to address the issues of sibling rivalry when children are young, because it can intensify and persist as children become adults. It is important not to give up when you feel frustrated. Things may even seem like they are worse before they start to improve. Because of your efforts and persistence, your children will learn how to get along better. That will prepare them to have productive relationships in the future.



West, B. (2002). How to Manage Sibling Rivalry. In L. Cope Grand (Ed.), *The Therapist's Newsletter Kit*, (pp. 149 —151). New York;; John Wiley & Sons, Inc.