From stunted development to obesity, screens are bad for kids

A [recent study](#) published in The Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics has raised concerns about the impact of excessive screen time on the development of young children. The study found that one-year-old children exposed to more than four hours of screen time daily experienced delays in communication and problem-solving abilities at the ages of two and four.

Anna Collard, SVP of content strategy and evangelist at KnowBe4 Africa, highlighted that children under the age of two learn less from a video than from human interaction.

"The screen may captivate them, but they are not learning from it. Excessive screen time can affect a child's ability to observe and experience the world, leading to a type of tunnel vision which affects development," she said.

The study also revealed that these children exhibited delays in fine motor, personal, and social skills at the age of two if they had been exposed to more screen time at the age of one. These findings echo the [concerns raised by Mary Aiken](#), a cyber psychologist and author of *The Cyber-Effect*, who has been warning about the impact of technology on young minds for several years.

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In a similar vein, the US National Institute of Health [found a significant correlation between screen media exposure and obesity in children](#). Their study underscores obesity as one of the most well-documented outcomes of excessive screen time, demonstrating a clear cause and effect relationship.

Prolonged screen use can encroach on playtime, a crucial component of infancy and early childhood development. Playtime fosters problem-solving skills, creativity, and mental agility, all of which are compromised when children substitute it with screen watching.

Limit the time children spend near screens

"Parents need to limit the time their children under the age of two spend near screens as much as possible," says Collard. "Ideally, do not let them have any screen time at all. For children older than two, set parental controls on all devices to restrict excessive screen usage. There are some clever tools that can help parents manage time on screens and safeguard their children from accessing inappropriate content."

By introducing these apps and implementing screen time discipline from an early age, the benefits can extend into a child's teenage and adult life. They will develop a healthier relationship with technology, enabling them to have better control over their tendency to endlessly browse social media and online platforms.

> *It is also worth introducing children to mindfulness apps and practices that promote emotional regulation, allowing them to gain better control over their digital activities*

"Mindfulness practices are a proven and powerful way for children to learn not to react to digital content that may trigger their emotions, which is one very important and healthy habit to have," says Collard.

"Furthermore, these practices will instil in children a reduced dependence on digital tools and heightened awareness of their surroundings."

Regular mindfulness

Research shows that regular mindfulness practice has a significant effect on brain structure. Specifically, it robustly promotes the expansion of the prefrontal cortex, the region responsible for decision-making, while simultaneously reducing the size of the amygdala, which is associated with anxiety and depression.

Collard believes that the recent Unesco bid to ban smartphones in schools is a very smart move.

"Until smartphone usage is controlled, and children are taught the responsible use of technology, banning smartphones in schools is an excellent decision," she concludes.

"The less screen time for children, the less likely they are to become addicted, lose out on developmental milestones and suffer from complex emotional fall out. Digital has its place, but it is not in front of kids."