



Physical effects of media use

The impact of using screen media (TV, videos, computers and computer games) on children's physical health has a number of aspects. These aspects include direct impacts of prolonged use such as:

- eyestrain
- repetitive strain injury
- postural problems.

There may also for some children be risks relating to:

- epilepsy
- electro magnetic radiation (EMR).

There are also displacement effects, that is, that computer use can displace involvement in physical activity.

Eyestrain

Gazing for long periods at a screen should be avoided. Focus should be shifted frequently to other objects in the room. Occupational health and safety guidelines indicate a break of ten minutes should be taken every hour, away from the screen. When watching TV, the conventional wisdom is that a child should not sit closer than two meters from the screen.

Repetitive strain injury

This can arise from overuse of a keyboard or spending too much time pressing buttons on a video game. Keyboards should be adjusted so that the forearms are not raised at an angle.

Postural problems

Care should be taken to ensure that seating supports the back; the neck is not arched back; the keyboard is adjusted so that the arms are not raised at an angle; and the feet are supported (ie on an angled stool). If posture is poor while using

computers for long periods, neck, back and posture problems can occur.

Electro magnetic radiation (EMR)

Closeness to any electrical appliance that is switched on exposes one to electro-magnetic radiation. Argument rages on what levels are safe and what are not, but a cautious approach suggests that less is better, particularly for children who tend to be more vulnerable to almost any form of pollution.

Epilepsy

Makers of video games warn that playing the games can cause attacks of epilepsy in susceptible individuals. This warning is supported by recent research.

Lack of physical activity

If children spend long hours in front of the TV and /or the computer, they are likely to have less time for physical activity.

In addition, daily hours of commercial TV will include a high level of advertisements for fatty, salty, sugary and fast foods. These can influence children's attitudes in the direction of "what's good to eat" rather than "what's good for them". Children also tend to snack while watching TV. The impact of hours at the TV set and eating frequently advertised foods is contributing to a rising problem of obesity in Australian children. (See related *Food advertising*)

On a positive note

Some studies suggest that playing computer games can improve hand-eye co-ordination.