

Children with bedroom TVs might be at greater obesity risk

April 29 2011, By Sharyn Alden



A new small study of Hispanic children found that those with TVs in their bedrooms were more likely to be overweight.

“Bedroom TVs lead to more screen time, sedentary behavior, less parental support of physical activity and increased fast food intake,” said Du Feng, Ph.D., lead study author.

Feng is a professor of human development and family studies at Texas Tech University. Her study appears online and in the May-June issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

The researchers sent surveys to 315 West Texas parents of 597 [children](#) ages 5 to 9 in kindergarten, first and second grade. They collected

information on children's weight, age, gender and body mass index.

“Seventy percent of the children had a [TV](#) in their bedroom, and 32 percent were already overweight or they were at risk for becoming overweight due to unhealthy behaviors,” Feng said.

Children with TVs in their bedrooms spent 3.5 hours a day in front of the screen compared with 2.58 hours of daily watching by kids who did not have a TV in their room. The kids without personal TVs also had parents who encouraged physical activity.

Kids with their own TVs tended to drink more sugar-sweetened drinks, and eat fewer fruits and veggies and more fast food. However, while these behaviors contribute to obesity, the researchers acknowledge that the study did not link definitively bedroom TV watching with being overweight or having a higher body mass index.

However, few would argue that easier TV access for children is a good thing.

“You wouldn't allow a stranger to sit alone with your child in their bedroom and to try to sell them things, would you?” said Dipesh Navsaria, M.D., a professor of pediatrics at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“The exposure of children to unhealthy lifestyles and food marketing by watching TV can dramatically exacerbate the situation,” said Navsaria, who practices in a community health center with a largely Latino population. “Another aspect that is important is the disruption of sleep: There is little stopping a child from turning a television at any time of night if they wake up and have disrupting sleep patterns. Without good sleep, obesity risks increase.”

Besides removing the bedroom TV, family health education is important. “I have seen multiple times when a parent felt that a TV in a child’s bedroom was not a good idea, but they didn’t feel empowered to remove it unless and until I told them it was important they do so,” he said.

New technology could provide a teachable moment. “With the change to high-definition TVs, parents may be replacing their current TVs and putting older TVs in their children’s bedrooms,” Feng said.” This is good time to educate parents about the American Academy of Pediatrics’ recommendation for two hours or less of daily TV viewing.”

More information: Feng-D, et al. Effects of TV in the bedroom of young Hispanic children. *Am J Health Promo* 25(5s), 2011.

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