

Study reveals relationship between how kids spend their time and their quality of life

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Balance in how children spend their time seems to be key to health-related quality of life. Credit: University of Auckland

We all know that balance is vital for a healthy diet, but a new study suggests balance in how you spend your time is also key to a healthy life

and sense of wellbeing – for children as well as adults.

The study, by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) in Melbourne, found that even as young as 11, how kids choose to spend their [time](#) may impact on their physical and mental health and self-reported quality of life.

"People tend to think about healthy lifestyle in terms of doing more of certain things – sleep, exercise, down-time – but what we found suggests it's more about the overall pattern and whether that's balanced," says Professor Melissa Wake, a senior researcher in the team who is now based at the University of Auckland.

Professor Wake, the new Cure Kids professor of child health research at the Liggins Institute and the University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, says it is likely that similar links between time-use and quality of life would be found in New Zealand [children](#).

The study, published in high-ranking journal *Pediatrics*, surveyed over 1,400 children aged 11 and 12. Participants were asked to fill out daily diaries detailing their use of time in five-minute increments across two 24-hour periods. This covered 260 different daily activities, including time spent showering and brushing teeth. The study looked at three outcome measures - overall quality of life, psychological health and physical health.

Four distinct time-use clusters emerged, which the team called:

- Studious Actives (highest school-related time; low [screen time](#); 22 percent of the children in the study)
- Techno Actives (highest [physical activity](#); lowest school-related time; 33 percent)
- Stay-home Screenies (highest screen time; mainly stay at home;

23 percent)

- Potterers (low physical activity; moderate screen time; 21 percent)

Compared to the healthiest Studious Actives, the Potterers had the poorest scores across all three measures of health-related quality of life. This finding suggests that promoting healthy time-use patterns at this age may promote good health through both adolescence and later life.

Lifestyle is a major determinant of adult health, says the study's lead author, Dr Monica Wong from MCRI.

"We know that both lifestyle and health trajectories are well established by adolescence and they have lifetime consequences. However, until now we didn't know whether overall time-use patterns are already associated with health-related quality of life as young as age 11-12 years," Dr Wong says.

A small number of children in the Potterers category reported that they would regularly play video games for eight hours straight and, disturbingly, couldn't recall if they had eaten lunch or gone to the toilet during that period.

Professor Wake says, "Instead of using our findings to blame and shame parents, we hope this study will encourage parents to ensure their kids get a good, balanced mix of activities in their daily lives.

"Our Studious Actives still spent, on average, about 1.2 hours a day on screens and 1.2 hours sitting in cars or other vehicles, but they also averaged around 2.2 hours of physical activity a day."

This study is one of the early results to be released as part of a landmark study of 4,000 children called Child Health Checkpoint, which could

shed light on the causes of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and other major health issues.

The next step is to gather data from a slightly older age group to see if the quality of life gap widens, particularly between the first three groups.

Study co-author at the University of South Australia, Professor Tim Olds, says, "The results for the first three categories were quite similar. We're interested to find out how children's [quality](#) of [life](#) will be impacted by their use of time as they move into their teens and start to make more independent choices."

This will help to better identify the risks children face as they get older and help parents guide their kids on how to spend their time.

Establishing healthy lifestyles by adolescence is thought to be key to future adult [health](#).

More information: Myriam Peralta-Carcelen et al. Behavioral Problems and Socioemotional Competence at 18 to 22 Months of Extremely Premature Children, *Pediatrics* (2017). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016-1043](#)

Provided by University of Auckland

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