

# Kids who plant themselves in front of TV more likely to have metabolic syndrome as adults

July 24 2023, by Sarah D. Collins

---



Here's another reason to get your kids up and moving: Excessive TV watching in childhood leads to a higher risk of metabolic syndrome at age 45, a new long-term study finds.

"What's really important about this is that even if these sedentary kids decided somewhere along the line, like in their 20s, that they wanted to get active, they still had increased metabolic risk at age 45. So the conclusion is that kids who were sedentary are at risk of health problems later on in life," said [Dr. Colleen Kraft](#), a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Los Angeles and professor at University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine.

Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of symptoms that increase your risk of stroke, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. These symptoms include high blood sugar, obesity, abnormal cholesterol levels and [high blood pressure](#).

Frequent TV watching during ages 5 through 15 was the most significant contributor to metabolic syndrome, according to the study. Notably, the findings were independent of adult TV watching habits.

Experts say it's also important to consider the evolution in technology since the study began.

"The alarming thing about this is that what do we see happening now versus 45 years ago? Kids on phones, on tablets, on computers, on screens for a lot of the day who are really not active," said Kraft, who was not part of the study. "So we're looking at an avalanche of health problems going forward if we don't focus on kids and give them opportunities to be active."

The recent COVID-19 pandemic only compounded [sedentary lifestyles](#), said [Dr. Scott Krakower](#), a child psychiatrist at Northwell Health in New

York, who was also not part of the study.

"During COVID, obviously people were in lockdown, they weren't able to do things, but there was also a [digital transformation](#) where things we could never do before we were doing on the screen," he said. "I do have concerns that people aren't getting out of the house enough, that they're not putting themselves out there, that in some ways they've become more reclusive with their creature comforts at home."

The study looked at more than 1,000 participants born in 1972 or 1973 in New Zealand. Their weekday television viewing times were recorded at ages 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 32. More childhood TV watching was associated with lower cardiorespiratory fitness and higher body mass index (BMI) at age 45, and higher odds for metabolic syndrome.

The study can't prove that too much screen time causes [metabolic syndrome](#), said the authors, led by [Dr. Robert Hancox](#), of the University of Otago's Dunedin School of Medicine. But the link is plausible, the researchers say, noting that hours of screen time take time away from [physical activity](#), which is tied to better health. At the same time, couch-potato kids are likely to be consuming sugary drinks and high-fat snacks.

Excessive screen time isn't just bad for kids' long term physical health. Earlier this year, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an [advisory](#) warning that [social media](#), a preferred activity of young people, can negatively impact their mental health and brain development.

"I'm seeing more kids on some of these [social media platforms](#). They can't get off the screen and it's really impacting their overall self-esteem, especially with the gaming and social media devices," said Krakower.

"In some ways, it keeps them social; it keeps them connected. You don't want to limit your child completely from this because it is so important

for their own emotional growth and maturation," he said. "But on the other hand, what I would say is that it can have a lot of negative impacts on their self-esteem and their growth. Because they're sitting at home, they're not getting out there."

So what can parents do to ensure their kids lead long and healthy lives independent of their devices?

"The most important thing about keeping [kids](#) active for parents is that you have to find places where they can play and you often have to be active with them," Kraft advised.

"So it means taking them to a park. It means dancing with them. It means being outside and riding bikes with them or taking walks with them. Kids are going to model what parents do. So if a parent is active, that child will be active. And really limit the screen time," Kraft said.

The study was published online July 24 in [Pediatrics](#).

**More information:** Nathan MacDonell et al, Childhood and Adolescent Television Viewing and Metabolic Syndrome in Mid-Adulthood, *Pediatrics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2022-060768](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2022-060768)

Copyright © 2023 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Kids who plant themselves in front of TV more likely to have metabolic syndrome as adults (2023, July 24) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-kids-front-tv-metabolic-syndrome.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.