

Video Games, TV Double Childhood Obesity Risk

Children Who Play Video Games, Watch TV More Likely to Be Obese

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July 2, 2004 -- Every hour children play video games or watch television may double their risk of obesity, a new study suggests.

It's not the first study to link childhood obesity with time spent in front of the television or playing video games, but researchers say this study offers new insight into the scope of the problem.

"To our knowledge this study provides the strongest evidence for an independent association between time spent playing electronic games and childhood obesity," says Nicolas Stettler, MD, pediatric nutrition specialist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, in a news release. "Our findings suggest that the use of electronic games should be limited to prevent childhood obesity."

The results appear in the June issue of *Obesity Research*.

Video Games, TV Raise Child Obesity Risks

The study looked at factors associated with obesity in 872 schoolchildren in Switzerland.

Researchers found that each hour the children played video games or watched television doubled the likelihood that the child was obese. Other factors that increased the risk of childhood obesity to a lesser extent were having a mother who worked outside the home or a father who smoked. The researchers speculate that unsupervised children may be more likely to eat large quantities of snack food after school. They also add that parental smoking may reflect a less health-conscious family environment.

Factors that lowered the risk of obesity among the children included physical activity and eating breakfast.

In addition, the study showed that children from other countries living in Switzerland were about twice as likely to be obese as Swiss children. They say non-Swiss children watched more television and had less physical activity than Swiss children. They add that differences in social economic status also played a part.

Researchers say the disparity in obesity rates among these children suggests the need for culturally sensitive prevention programs that target the risk factors identified by this study.

"Because obesity is difficult to treat once it has been established, obesity prevention during childhood is an essential component of the efforts to combat this global epidemic, and further research on obesity prevention is necessary," says Stettler.

SOURCES: Stettler, N. *Obesity Research*, June 2004; vol 12: pp 896-303. News release, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

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