

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Screen Media – Its Influence and Recommendations

Are you familiar with the term screen media? Screen media is visual content delivered via digital screens that include TV, cinematic screen, computer screen, and smaller screens such as smartphones and other handheld devices. Children enjoy watching television (TV) or playing games on a computer. Should they be able to watch TV or play games, as much as they want, or should there be a time limit? According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) MedlinePlus (2017), screen time is the amount of time someone spends in front of the television, computers, games console, or any visual screen.

MedlinePlus (2017) suggests that during screen time there is very little energy being used and on most occasions the individuals are inactive. Children that have too much screen time are at risk for gaining weight and for obesity.

- When children see food commercials they may want to eat.
- The food that is advertised may be high in sugar, salt, or fat.
- When watching TV and eating - children may eat more.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) recommends the following screen media guidelines for young children:

- Educate parents about brain development in the early years and the importance of hands-on, unstructured, and social play to build language, and cognitive- and social-emotional skills.
- For children younger than 18 months, avoid use of screen media. Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming and watch it with their children to help them understand what they're seeing.
- For children ages 2 to 5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs such as Sesame Street. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.
- For children younger than 2 years, there is limited evidence of benefits. Adult interaction with children is crucial.



Child care providers should have planned activities indoors and outdoors (weather permitting) that would allow the children to walk, play games, or plant a garden. Save screen time for educational purposes or physical activity only. Always let parents know if there is screen time. Make sure there is no advertising included in screen time.

Exposure to screen media has become common for children. Research has shown that children who spend a lot of time watching TV are easily swayed to choose foods they see advertised (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016). Screen time should be limited regardless if it is “good” or “appropriate” screen time.



Below are some suggestions from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found at eatright.org.

- As a child care provider, agree to avoid watching TV or using electronic devices while eating.
- Set aside time to spend together for growing a garden, visiting a farmer's market, or looking through the produce section of a grocery store.

Keep in mind that the early years are a time of critical brain development, building secure relationships, and establishing positive health behaviors.

Additional recommendations for families include

- Create a personalized media usage plan like the one offered by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Check it out: www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan
- Designate media-free times together, such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms.



Be a good role model!

- Among children 3 to 5 years old television programs that are well-designed can improve cognition, literacy, and social outcomes. However, most apps that may be under the “educational” category do not have evidence of efficacy (capable of having a desired result or effect) and have no input from developmental specialist or educators.
- Keep mealtimes and parent-child playtimes screen free for children and parents.
- No screen time 1 hour before naptime or bedtime, and remove devices from bedrooms before bed.

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