

BRIGHT FUTURES  TOOL FOR FAMILIES

## Top TV Tips: Building a Balanced TV Diet

You are your child's first and most influential teacher. The values and coping behaviors your child learns now will last a lifetime. Use TV to promote your child's health by building a balanced TV diet.

### WATCH WHAT THEY EAT AND WATCH WHAT THEY WATCH

How much and what your child eats has a big impact on his health; so does how much and what TV he watches.

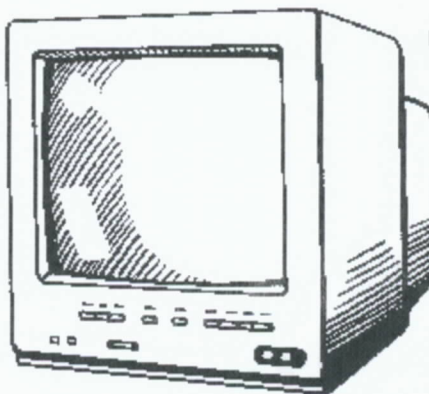
- Chart your family's current TV intake by listing all TV shows watched in a week.
- Discuss how much time your family spends watching TV, which programs are worthwhile, and which programs can be dropped in favor of other activities.
- Be a good TV-viewer role model for your child.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents limit their children's TV viewing to 1 to 2 hours of quality programming a day. Parents should also take advantage of high-quality programs offered on videocassettes or from other sources.

### KNOW WHAT'S INSIDE THE BOX

You carefully read the labels on the foods your child eats. Do the same with TV. Lots of sugary sweets are not good for children and adolescents. Neither are programs with violence, lewd language, and sexual overtones.

- Read the TV listings and reviews.
- Preview programs before your child sees them. Talk to teachers and your health professional to learn what programs they recommend.



- Select TV programs that build interest in other activities, such as reading, hobbies, or the outdoors.

### ADD PLENTY OF NUTRITIOUS CONTENT

Look for TV "main dishes" with educational content and positive characters and values. Research has indicated

that school readiness and verbal and math abilities were greater in children who watched *Sesame Street* and other educational programs than in those who did not (Wright and Huston, 1995).

### SIT DOWN WITH A GOOD "TV MEAL"; DON'T JUST SNACK AWAY

Don't let your child just "watch TV." The next time your child asks, "Can I watch TV?" ask her what specific program she wants to watch. Help your child get in the habit of watching one TV program, then turning the TV off and doing something else. Involve your child in setting TV rules.

Some other ideas for healthy TV viewing are as follows:

- Don't let your child watch TV until after his homework or chores are done.
- Make an extra effort to watch some shows with your child. By watching together, you are telling your child you care. "Co-viewing"

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and talking together about what you watch can lead to lasting educational benefits.

- Videotape quality shows and view them at a later time.

#### PUT DOWN THE CLICKER AND GET SOME FAMILY EXERCISE

TV should not replace active play. Your TV diet will be most successful when it includes lots of “family exercises,” such as family discussions and activities.

TV programs should be springboards that spur curiosity, discussion, and learning.

To help your child learn from the programs she watches, you can take the following steps:

- Talk with your child. Ask questions before or during a program—for example, “What do you think will happen next?” Or, after the program, ask, “What did you learn from that program?” or “Why do you like to watch that character?”
- When you see a portrayal that offends you, let your child know. Teach your child that programs that glorify violence or promiscuity or that present gender, racial, cultural, or other stereotypes are against your values.

- Weave “a web of learning” for your child. Good TV programs can spark interest in related books, conversations, and activities.

For further information on TV content ratings to help you supervise the TV watching of your child, contact

TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board  
P.O. Box 14097

Washington, DC 20004

Phone: (202) 879-9364

Web site: <http://www.tvguidelines.org>

#### REFERENCE

Wright JR, Huston AC. 1995. *Effects of Educational TV Viewing of Lower Income Preschoolers on Academic Skills, School Readiness, and School Adjustment One to Three Years Later: A Report to Children's Television Workshop*. Austin, TX: Center for Research on the Influences of Television on Children (CRITC).

Source: Adapted, with permission, from Chen M. 1997. *Smart Parent's Guide to Kid's TV*. San Francisco, CA: Bay Books.

[www.brightfutures.org](http://www.brightfutures.org)

In: Jellinek M, Patel BP, Froehle MC, eds. *Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health Toolkit, Volume II*. Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.



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