

Should TVs Carry a Warning Label?

By the American institute for Cancer Research

Obesity and overweight are consistently linked to television viewing. A large national study of eight- to sixteen-year-olds found that obesity was lowest among those watching an hour or less of TV a day, and highest among those watching four or more hours. Among adults, studies report that those who watch more than 2.5 hours are two to four times more likely to be overweight than those who watch less than an hour a day.

Besides being less likely to exercise, those who watch more TV are more likely to gain weight for a number of reasons. Excess weight is also attributed to increased calorie consumption while watching TV, excess eating at other times due to TV commercials, or a reduced metabolic rate, which may occur if you stare at the screen too long.

Excess weight and lack of exercise are both considered possible cancer promoters. The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) advises adults to limit weight gain to no more than 11 pounds in adulthood. Individuals should also exercise a total of 60 minutes each day at a moderate level for cancer protection.

Look for the Off Button

One way to encourage children or yourself to be more active is to limit TV viewing. Guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend limiting children's total media time (TV and video games) to no more than one to two hours of quality programs a day. Reading, sports, hobbies and creative play are also good alternatives. It's also wise to keep TV's out of children's bedrooms.

Adults can cut back on viewing time by watching only the programs that really interest them. Instead of flipping through channels, the local recreation department, gym or YMCA may have stimulating exercise classes that can become an absorbing new habit.

Exercise While You Watch

Reports estimate that the average adult watches TV 22 to 28 hours a week. At the same time, experts estimate that one in four adults fails to exercise at all in their leisure time. One obvious remedy for inactivity is to exercise right in front of the TV. During the commercial breaks in a half-hour program, squeeze in 10 minutes of exercise. Some activities can be done even during programs, like lifting free weights or riding a stationary bicycle. Here are two more:

Overhead Presses. Sit on a stool or low-backed chair. With both hands, hold a soup can or heavier weight above your head. Slowly bend your arms at the elbows, lowering the weight behind your head. Then slowly lift the weight, straightening your elbows.

Leg Extensions. Sit on a chair or stool with your legs together and feet on the floor. Holding the sides of the chair, straighten one leg, hold for a second and slowly lower your foot by bending the knee. Repeat with the other leg.

*For more help getting started, call and order a free copy of *A Healthy Weight for Life* from AICR. The toll free number is 1-800-843-8114, ext. 10.*