



## How screen time affects rest

<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/enewsletter/screen-time-and-sleep>

When little ones don't get enough shut-eye they can become cranky, tired and moody, and run the risk of developing a host of physical and behavioural problems. And with more children using technology (at younger and younger ages), sleep specialists are seeing a clear link between too much screen time - the use of TV, computers and mobile devices - and poor quality of rest.

"The main effect of overusing media devices is that it can decrease the total amount of sleep kids get," says Dr Sarah Loughran, sleep researcher at the University of Wollongong.

She says excess screen time can hamper sleep in three main ways:

- Timing - the use of electronic media can lead to delays in children's bedtimes, resulting in less time being available for sleep.
- Content - engaging the brain with exciting or provocative information before bed may trigger emotional and hormonal responses (like adrenalin), which can reduce the ability to fall and stay asleep.
- Light emissions - light from electronic devices can disrupt the body's natural occurring circadian rhythm, increasing alertness and suppressing the release of the hormone melatonin, which is important for regulating our sleep-wake cycle.

Being wise to your child's screen time consumption can have far-reaching benefits for the whole family, for instance, more sleep! It should only take a few adjustments to your evening routine. Dr Loughran suggests the following:

- Set a 'bed time' for media devices this should happen one or two hours before kids go to sleep, and applies to adults too so everyone gets into good habits.
- Tweak their bedtime routine- let kids wind-down properly in the run-up to bed, replacing screen time with gentle activities like stories, talking or bathing.
- No media devices in the bedroom- kids may kick back at first, but you will soon see the rewards of setting and sticking to this tough rule.
- Replace screen time with exercise during the day outdoor exercise in bright light is wonderful for sleep and helps balance their 'virtual' and real lives.
- Limit food and drinks during screen time, especially at night electronic devices tend to encourage mindless over-eating and drinking (especially of caffeine), which can stimulate the body and

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imbalance hormones.

What constitutes 'too much' screen time remains to be defined. You might like to read up on the [Department of Health guidelines](#). They recommend that children five to 12 years have no more than two hours of screen-based entertainment per day, and that two-to-five year olds have less than one hour.

Dr Loughran is currently recruiting for participants to take part in the following research programs being run at the University of Wollongong:

- The impact of sleep deprivation and screen time on children with and without ADHD.
- The effects of mobile phone emissions on brain activity in children during sleep.

If you are interested in getting involved, please contact her at [loughran@uow.edu.au](mailto:loughran@uow.edu.au).

