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NIH News

National Institutes of Health

[National Heart, Lung, and
Blood Institute \(NHLBI\)](#)

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We Can! Joins National Call for Reducing Screen Time During Turnoff Week

Children and teens who spend more than a couple of hours a day on average in front of a TV, video, computer screen, are more likely to be overweight than their peers who limit their screen time. We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition), a science-based national education program from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to help children ages 8-13 stay at a healthy weight, is working with the Center for Screen Time Awareness (CSTA) and other national and community organizations to raise awareness about the negative impact of excessive screen time. CSTA is a leading nonprofit organization focused on the impact of electronic media on society, health, education, family and community.

Turnoff Week, April 21-27, is an excellent time to start limiting recreational screen time and boosting physical activity and healthier living.

"We know that the more time a child spends in front of the TV or computer, the more likely he or she will be overweight," said Acting U.S. Surgeon General Steven K. Galson, M.D., M.P.H. "Kids are spending more time sitting in front of screens every day than they do anything else except perhaps sleeping. For Turnoff Week, we are asking parents to turn off the screens and get active with their kids."

Although the Turnoff Week awareness campaign formally lasts only seven days each year, Galson said, "We encourage parents to regularly limit recreational screen time to fewer than two hours a day."

More than 12.5 million American children and adolescents are overweight, putting them at increased risk for chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and asthma. Recognizing the prevention of childhood overweight as a national health priority, Galson leads the "Youth for a Healthy Future" childhood overweight and obesity prevention initiative and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Childhood Overweight and Obesity Coordinating Council. The council is working with federal agencies and community stakeholders as they develop and foster programs such as We Can! that share the goal of providing options for community-based interventions.

To help families make important lifestyle changes to prevent childhood overweight, the We Can! program offers sensible, evidence-based guidance and tips for parents to help them not only reduce screen time but also to encourage physical activity and better nutrition choices. "Today more than ever, parents need to keep their kids at a healthy weight," said Karen A. Donato, S.M., program coordinator of We Can! and the Obesity Education Initiative of NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). "By doing simple things like keeping TVs out of our kids' rooms or logging screen time to get an accurate picture

daily habits, parents can begin to address this very real problem in a productive, positive way."

At the national launch of 2008 Turnoff Week, held at the University of the District of Columbia, Rosemary Kesten, CSTA executive director, pointed out some stark realities: "Many kids are spending more than two hours every day in front of screens, when they really should be spending less than two. As parents, you have a large role in changing this reality, and Turnoff Week is a great opportunity to start." CSTA is the largest nonprofit organization focused on the impact of electronic media on society, health, education, family, and community. The organization provides information so people can make intelligent decisions leading to healthier lives, functional families and vibrant communities.

Consider the facts:

- Every day, children ages eight to 18 spend more than six hours watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer for recreational purposes.
- The more time youth spend in front of the screen, the more likely they are to be overweight.
- Overweight is highest among children watching four or more hours a day.
- Research has shown that children who reduced their screen time showed decreases in body mass index (BMI), which measures body fat related to height, and decreases in unhealthy weight gain.

We Can! offers the following tips for parents:

- Agree to limit screen time to no more than 2 hours a day.
- Don't put a TV in your child's bedroom.
- Make screen time, active time by doing simple exercises during commercial breaks.
- Take a family walk after dinner instead of turning on the TV.
- Turn off the TV and play ball at the park.

Parents and others can download a free screen time log to help assess the amount of time children and family members spend watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer for recreational purposes. The log sheets and other strategies to limit family screen time are part of the We Can! curriculum for parents, "We Can! Energize Our Families," which is offered by hundreds of community sites nationwide.

In addition to ideas for parents to turn screen time into active time, We Can! offers lessons for youth to adapt healthier lifestyles, including the Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television (SMART) curriculum and Media Smart Youth: Eat, Think, and Be Active! A Curriculum for Youth. Four NIH Institutes have combined their unique resources and activities to create We Can!: the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; and the National Cancer Institute. We Can! is unique among existing youth obesity-prevention initiatives in its focus on reaching parents and families as a primary group for influencing young people. The program offers flexible, tailored resources complete with partnership ideas and outreach opportunities to unite community organizations.

For more information, on We Can!, visit <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call toll-free 866-35-WE CAN! (866-359-3226).

To arrange an interview with Ms. Donato, contact the NHLBI Communications Office at (301) 496-

email nhlbi_news@nhlbi.nih.gov. To interview Dr. Galson, call (202) 205-0143. To speak with Mr. [redacted] or for more information about CSTA, call 202-333-9220 or email rkesten@screeentime.org.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — *The Nation's Medical Research Agency* — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

Resources:

- *We Can!*, <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>
- *We Can!* Wean the Screen, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/liveit/wean.htm>
- **Office of the Surgeon General: Childhood Obesity Prevention and "Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future,"** <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/obesityprevention.html>

NOTES TO MEDIA:

For broadcast media: A bites/b-roll package including sound bites from Acting U.S. Surgeon General Rear Admiral Galson will be fed on the following days and times:

Tuesday, April 15, 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Eastern time and Friday, April 18, 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Eastern time

Satellite Name: Horizon 2, 74.05 Degrees West

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For general questions regarding the newsfeed, contact Jem Haskin at Tribalco, LLC, at 301-652-8451 or 301-652-102. For interviews, contact the NHLBI Communications Office at 301-496-4236.

