



# SCALE BACK ON SCREEN TIME

Screen time has a major impact when it comes to our health. Frequently watching television, playing video games, and spending time on a smart phone or in front of a computer screen replaces the physical activity we need to be healthy. This may possibly cause negative health effects such as obesity, problems sleeping, behavior issues, and the lack of social skills in adults, children, and youth.

Here are some ideas to help you and your family scale back on screen time:

## **Set a screen time schedule.**

Most people spend an average of 7 to 10 hours on screen time. The recommended amount of screen time is as follows: no screen time for children under age 2, 1 hour a day for children ages 2 to 12 years old, and 2 hours a day for teens and adults. Start with small steps. Try cutting your current screen time in half until you reach the goal of 1 to 2 hours or less a day.

## **Cut back from social media.**

Social media has its advantages and disadvantages for many users. While social media is a way to keep in contact with loved ones, some people utilize it for business. It is no argument that social media plays a major role in our lives. However, for many people, social media can lead to time spent being unproductive. Try to limit the amount of time you spend daily on social media platforms by gradually cutting back more, especially on the days you find your screen usage is high.

## **Create a screen free zone.**

Set up space in your home where you do not allow electronics, such as smartphones and laptops. For example, the kitchen and dining room can be a great screen free zone reserved for meals and family conversations, and no screens in the bedroom or bathroom, no exception. Creating these screen free zones will help reduce screen time and strengthen family bonding when you're together.

## **Enjoy the outdoors.**

Make time to go walking outdoors for at least 30 minutes a day. Use your phone to listen to some good music or an interesting podcast while you walk to make it more fun! Being active outside will boost your mood and enhance your overall physical health. Another idea is to start on those outdoor home projects that you have been meaning to get to.

## **Use apps to help you track.**

Use app timers and limitation tools to help you with your scale back on screen time goals. Some smart phones and other devices come with built-in app timers and downloadable apps as well. These tools can help you track how much time you are spending on your devices. Then, in some cases, you can schedule your device to limit access to apps after a certain amount of time. This feature is great for parents who are monitoring their children's screen time.

**INCLUSION MATTERS:** While watching your screen time is important, you can also focus on incorporating active screen time. Active screen time allows you to interact with the media through movement like active video games. Active video games are often referred to as a "gateway experience" to other forms of physical activity meaning that as you enjoy moving and playing a video game, you might also realize that you want to continue this type of movement with a home workout video or group fitness class. Incorporating these types of movement-based games into our day can help us increase overall physical activity, reduce sedentary screen time, and help us expend energy. Active video games are a great inclusive way for people with disabilities or mobility limitations

to get moving. There are many adaptations to game controllers and provisions for seated play that can be done in home or community environments. Active video games also provide an outlet for social interaction with friends or family members through a virtual space that is so important during these times.

Watch out for blue light. Blue light from screens and devices enters deep into our eyes and can cause digital eye strain and issues with sleep by suppressing our body's natural release of melatonin. For daytime screen use, consider using blue-light filtering lenses that improve screen contrast and reduce eye strain. You can also utilize the night mode and dark feature on smart phones to reduce blue light for night use.

**FAMILY MATTERS:** Encourage your family to get active and reduce time scrolling on social media and the internet. Parents are important role models to their children and can affect their behaviors. Be a positive influence in your child's life by limiting your own screen time and enjoying the outdoors or trying a new hobby. Find ways to make the phone more useful. Download fun and educational apps for kids that help keep them moving or learning new skills!

## **LINKS:**

**Screen time and COVID-19:** <https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/home-family/screen-time-and-covid-19/>

**Screen time and body weight:** <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/screen-time-and-body-weight-is-there-a-connection>