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Screen time for 2 to 5 year old babies: Impacts on their social, cognitive and behavioural development

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Abstract

The present study is aimed to describe the harmful effects of mobile phone usage among babies of 2 to 5 year of age group. Although it has been a relieving tool for mothers as babies keep themselves occupied for sometime but there are long lasting effects on their mental development. Babies seek attention most often and in today's tech and media-driven world, many parents use screens to keep young children entertained or distracted while they juggle other needs. It works. Screens captivate children's attention in a way almost nothing else does, allowing parents a bit of a breather. But what is the impact of screens on young brains and how much screen time should they be exposed to? This paper aims to summarise the effects, signs, remedies and alternatives of screen time for children. This study examines the effects of screen time on many developmental domains and covers management and limitation techniques for kids' screen usage.

Keywords: Mental development, juggle, entertained, screen

Introduction

Children's heavy reliance on screen media has raised serious public health issues since it might harm their cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional growth. Screen media has a wide range of cognitive consequences, with both beneficial and detrimental effects noted.

If you're a parent, you've probably been there. You have a baby howling for attention, but you need to cook dinner or something important then there occurs some role conflict. Baby TV shows, touch tablets, and digital phone toys can feel like lifesavers in keeping an active infant calm and contained while juggling what life brings.

But a new study suggests that too much screen time during infancy may lead to changes in brain activity, as well as problems with executive functioning—the ability to stay focused and control impulses, behaviours, and emotions - in elementary school.

The infant brain thrives on enriching interactions with the environment, and excessive infant screen time can reduce opportunities for real-world interactions that are important for brain development. Especially today, when screens are with us all the time, we need to better support parents in non-screen time tips and tricks to keep infants engaged and parents sane.

Babies and kids are also social learners and very much benefit from the back-and-forth interaction with others (adults and kids) which is hard to achieve with screens

Time spent playing with a tablet or smartphone means your baby is not crawling, walking, climbing and exploring her environment. Even at this very young age, being active means your child is less likely to become overweight or have health problems later in life. As your child grows, having too much screen time may also cause her sleeping difficulties. Because phones and tablets are so convenient, young children are more exposed to screen time than ever before. In fact, 90% of 2-year-olds are regularly watching programs on screens. The best way for babies to learn and develop is through adult interaction, modeling and teaching, experts note. Screens come in so many forms – whether it be the TV, mobile phone, or iPad. In the first years of life, children undergo a rapid period of growth and development. Their visual system is still forming: they must learn to see, and learn to coordinate their eye movements.

Objectives

1. To understand the harmful effects of mobile phone usage among children.

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2. To study the addictive behaviour of toddlers towards mobile phones.
3. To study the signs of addiction among children towards mobile phones.
4. To understand the safe time range for screen time.
5. To study the alternatives of mobile phones for children.

Methodology: This study is purely qualitative in nature. Direct observation is undertaken as primary source of data collection. Secondary sources such as newspapers, articles, magazines, books etc. are also used in present research article.

Signs of screen addiction in kids

1. Your kids want to watch some form of entertainment all the time, and normal kids things like toys and playing outside don't seem as fun.
2. They get frustrated when it's done. Maybe it's a bad attitude or tears. Things that can help this are giving kids a heads up that it's almost over, letting them turn the T.V. off, or letting them know how many episodes they'll be aloud to watch before it starts.
3. Sneaking extra time playing iPad games.
4. If shows and games are a huge part of what they talk about and what they re-enact, that's your clue they probably spend too much time watching T.V.

Why must you reduce screen time for children

- Early childhood is a period of rapid development and a time when family lifestyle patterns can be adapted to boost health gains.
- Screen time is thought to affect the visual, mental and physical development of babies and toddlers.
- No screen time is recommended for babies 0 to 2 years of age; preferably less than 1 hour a day of screen time for 2 year olds, and no more than 1 hour a day for 3 to 4 year olds.
- Watching TV while feeding your baby or child can mean that you miss the cues that she has had enough. Your child too may be distracted and not notice when she feels full. It is important to be responsive to your baby when feeding them and screen time can get in the way for all of you.
- When playing and interacting with others, a baby or toddler naturally shifts their attention and gaze from near to far, which helps stimulate and strengthen important visual skills like eye muscle coordination.
- Children under five must spend less time sitting watching screens, or restrained in prams and seats, get better quality sleep and have more time for active play if they are to grow up healthy, according to new guidelines issued by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Improving physical activity, reducing sedentary time and ensuring quality sleep in young children will improve their physical, mental health and fitness and help prevent childhood obesity and associated diseases later in life.
- The pattern of overall 24-hour activity is key: replacing prolonged restrained or sedentary screen time with more active play, while making sure young children get enough good-quality sleep. Quality sedentary time spent in interactive non-screen-based activities with a

caregiver, such as reading, storytelling, singing and puzzles, is very important for child development.

How screen time impacts the social and cognitive development of babies

Exposure to screens reduces babies' ability to read human emotion and control their frustration. It also detracts from activities that help boost their brain power, like play and interacting with other children. But if you have to rely on screens at certain moments, just make sure to control the quality of what they see and engage with them while they're watching. The benefits of limiting and even eliminating screen time in these early moments will last a lifetime.

Until babies develop language, all communication is non-verbal, so they depend heavily on looking at a face and deriving meaning from that face. Is this person happy with me, or are they upset at me. That two-way interaction between children and adult caregivers is critically important for brain development. Screen time inhibits young children's ability to read faces and learn social skills, two key factors needed to develop empathy. Face-to-face interactions are the only way young children learn to understand non-verbal cues and interpret them. For a brain to develop and grow, it needs essential stimuli from the outside world. More importantly, they need time to process those stimuli. While reading storybooks out loud gives children time to process words, images and voices, the constant absorption of on-screen images and messages affects their attention span and focus.

As part of a major research study of thousands of children to try to understand the impact of screen time on young children, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found that children who reported more than two hours a day of screen time got lower scores on thinking and language tests.

That same study found that children with lots of screen time had a premature thinning of the outermost layer of their brains (The cerebral cortex). This layer is the most evolved brain region and supports the highest-order cognitive functions. Affects Social Skills. Although mobile phones are primarily used for social networking, there's no doubt that these devices can have consequences when it comes to the development of social skills. Smartphones could lead to your child becoming distracted from their surroundings. This could lead them to become less conversational, and thus affecting how they develop the essential social skills for life.

How screen time impacts the physical development

- Babies' sleep and subsequent brain development is potentially being harmed by touchscreen device use. A University of London study showed that there are "point by point" increases in sleep interruption, meaning that a quarter of an hour on a screen might be reflected in four minutes' less sleep. Sleep is essential for the development of the brain, particularly during the first few years of life. The study was unable to determine any "cutoff" for screen use; there was no established amount that had zero impact.
- Additional research has shown links between screen time and toddler obesity, sleep disruption during early childhood, and diminished fine motor development.
- Before we all had smartphones, earlier research was already showing that time spent watching TV was taking away from time interacting with siblings and

parents, engaging in creative play, and doing homework. There's good reason to believe that these effects are the same or greater with handheld devices today.

- Scientists have shared that video chats such as Facetime are different from other screen media, and not harmful in the same way. Even many parents who say no to screens in all other aspects of their children's lives are fine with video chats because the science supports that the serve-and-return conversation and real-time interaction are good for learning and bonding.
- That said, it's best to avoid video chats right before bed time, when the screen light is most likely to disrupt crucial sleep time.

How much screen time should my child have?

Screen time is really hard to minimize and manage when we're just trying to get through the day. Common advice for the under-twos is to allow no screen time at all.

If you decide to let your baby or toddler play with your device, try keeping it to 15 or 20 minutes, when their attention is likely to fade anyway. Be ready with something new and interesting to do next.

For older children, doctors suggest a limit of one or two hours of total screen time a day. That means TV, DVDs and computers as well as mobile devices. This is also a common recommendation in countries like the US.

How to get things done without screens

Sometimes, you are too busy in the house with chores and it just seems impossible to get anything done without the helpful screen as a distraction for the kid. However, for very young kids, it's best to avoid screen time. You can involve them in small chores with you or get them busy with toys or coloring books. Keep a track of your child's screen time and ensure it stays limited. Be aware of how much screen time you engage in at home. There is a link between how much TV you as a parent watch and how much your child watches, so try to lead by example. And there's wide expert agreement that TV, computers and games should not be switched on during mealtimes. Mealtimes are an important chance for families to build good eating habits and enjoy a chat. Make the most of props around you. Planes and restaurants can be more fun if you use what is already there: ice cubes and cups, the window shade (On a plane), or napkins (Use it to hide snacks, play peek-a-boo). Also, once you put devices away you start to notice how many people might love to talk to your baby.

Teaching kids the strategies of viewing skills, such as interpreting the program content and carefully observing details.

- Limit the child's media watching time, content, and type.
- Discourage media use as a comforting tool.
- Encourage digital detox time and engage in other activities away from screens.
- Set up children's bedrooms free from TV and other electronic media devices.
- Following the 20-20-20 rule, i.e., for every 20 min of screen use, take a break and look at something 20 feet away for 20 s. Practicing the 20-20-20 rule will help alleviate digital visual strain and safeguard the eyes from various vision disorders.

- Parents should set lower screen-time limits for themselves.
- Parents should be wise in replacing screen time with other activities, such as outdoor playtime, skill development, sleep, interaction with friends and family, studies, and physical activities vital for children's overall health and development.
- Parents should be educated on the consequences and possible detrimental effects of excessive media and screen usage

Conclusion

At any age, your involvement is really important. Your child will probably learn a lot more if you spend time getting involved with her, rather than leaving her to do it on her own. Focus on physical playtime for babies. What we really need to do is bring back play for children. More of outdoor games and activities like gardening, playing with mud, sports, dancing etc.

Children must be aware of their surroundings. Recognising sounds of birds, animals, vehicles add to growth of their senses. Childhood is a great time to enjoy little things and be more joyful rather than being a screen robot.

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