

Square Eyes

Submitted by: Bray Leino

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(Family case studies available in Birmingham, Southampton, Plymouth, Cardiff, Chelmsford and Ipswich – regional survey statistics are also available)

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British teens' addiction to TV, PCs, laptops, Gameboys and iPods means they spend TWO AND A HALF MONTHS a year staring at screens, according to a new study.

Teenagers spend a whopping 20 per cent of their day sat playing on their handheld games consoles, watching movies on an iPod or surfing on the internet.

But despite the array of hi-tech gadgets teens can stare at, it's the trusty TV that grabs most of their attention – with the average young adult now spending two hours every single day glued to the telly.

According to the British Dietetic Association's (<http://www.teenweightwise.com>) poll of 3,000 teenagers, two-thirds watch at least 25 minutes of TV before they leave the house for school.

This recreational screen 'addiction' is on top of the important educational work carried out on a computer at school, where a third of pupils will spend at least an hour sitting behind a screen during their day.

Carried out as part of the BDA's Weight Wise: The Next Generation campaign to reduce teenage obesity, the research also revealed that instead of riding a bike to school, most children are taken there or ride on the bus/coach. During that travel time, one in ten teens prefers to turn again to their games consoles for a fantasy world fix.

Food

Food won't even distract young couch potatoes from their avid screen staring – over a third of British teens eat their evening meal on their laps in front of the box.

And whilst research shows that one in five teens skips breakfast each morning, almost one in ten of those skips breakfast because they would prefer spending the extra time lying in bed.

Dr Frankie Phillips, registered dietitian and BDA spokesperson said: "Hi-tech gadgets have such a powerful influence on youth culture today and it's shocking how long teenagers spend in front of a screen each day.

"There are so many demands on the time and energies that teenagers have, with school and college work, part-time jobs and socialising. It has also amazed us that there is no real help or guidance provided for teens – they really are a forgotten generation. Our aim is to change that now. Through Weight

Wise: The Next Generation we will show that by moving more, eating out, smart snacking and making food last when you're on a budget can all fit in easily – if you get into healthy habits – and that's where our dietitians are able to lend a hand.”

Physical Activity

With most kids' bedrooms now filled with every mod con available, it's not surprising that over a third of young adults devote more than 90 minutes to their 'techie' toys every night.

PCs proved a popular evening companion, with almost a quarter of mini-sloths logging on for at least an hour's screen-gazing action.

The research found more than two-thirds of teenagers admit they should do more physical activity, but 30 per cent just look forward to finishing school or university each day - so they can get straight back in front of the telly.

A third would rather spend their free time involved in pastimes that didn't involve much movement.

“The lack of physical activity is really taking its toll on teenagers' health, it's no wonder that obesity levels are rising at such a huge rate. If teens could replace half the amount of time they spend on screen-based recreation with physical activity, they would look and feel so much better.”

Weight Wise: The Next Generation is run by registered dietitians all over the UK to help teens get more active, healthier and more weight wise about what they're eating.

“It doesn't have to be hard to get into healthy habits at all. The main key is just to move more to burn off the energy we're eating. Coupled with making time for regular meals (especially breakfast), reducing high calorie foods & drinks and supersizing fruit and vegetable portions, everyone can aim for a healthier size.”

-ENDS-

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) is the professional association for registered dietitians working in the UK.

Notes:

- The survey sample was 3,114 teenagers aged predominantly from 13-19 (but with some 10-12 year olds) geographically spread across the UK

- The eating plans suggested by the BDA dietitians are very easy to follow and even factor in takeaway food, snacks and eating out at restaurants (factsheets & top tips available)

- The campaign's website: www.teenweightwise.com is packed full of info and advice for teenagers who want to find out more about healthy eating

- Teenagers can log on to find out how much more energy they could be burning off by checking out the Get Moving Calculator

- For teens and parents alike there are some fantastic recipe ideas, tips on how to get more active as well as Shifting The Balance

– an interactive feature that allows teens to find out just how much fat and sugar is in the everyday food they eat

- The BDA's Weight Wise: The Next Generation campaign will be running from June with regional/local activity following on throughout the rest of the year

- Dr Frankie Phillips is a registered dietitian and is the Food First co-ordinator for the BDA

- This campaign is supported by Kellogg's, Sainsbury's, Food and Drink Federation's foodfitness programme, Tanita, Food Standards Agency (FSA), Sport England/Everyday Sport and 'My Dolmio'

The Food Standards Agency will be holding a live diet and nutrition webchat, at 4pm on Thursday 22nd June, hosted on Sugar Magazine's

website: - www.sugarmagazine.co.uk - with a BDA-member dietitian available to answer questions

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