

Kids are still glued to the TV



Tim Boyle / Getty Images

STUDY: Of 709 Minnesota and Iowa children, just 12% of boys and 16% of girls met guidelines for limiting TV and for walking.

A study of Minnesota and Iowa children finds that less than 20% met daily guidelines for taking a minimum number of steps and limiting screen time.

By Jeannine Stein, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
April 21, 2008

Getting kids to exercise more and cut down on television watching can dramatically reduce their risk of being overweight. No surprise there. We even know just how much activity they should have and how little TV they should watch.

And *still* the job is apparently Herculean for kids to do and parents to enforce.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that boys take at least 11,000 steps per day, girls 13,000 steps per day, and total screen time should be limited to two hours per day. Seems reasonable, no? Apparently not.

A group of 709 children (ages 7 to 12) from public elementary schools in Iowa and Minnesota were given pedometers to wear for a week. They were also surveyed about their weekday and weekend television habits, which included watching TV as well as playing video games.

Among those who met both recommendations (12% of the boys and 16% of the girls), 10% of the boys and 20% of the girls were overweight. Among boys and girls who met neither guideline, 35%

to 40% were overweight.

"I wouldn't say those numbers surprised me," says Kelly Laurson, a doctoral candidate in the department of kinesiology at Iowa State University. "But it reflects how important it is for children to meet these physical activity and screen-time cut points." Total mean screen time for all boys was 4 1/2 hours a day, and 3 1/2 hours for girls. The study used data on the same group of children compiled by the Minneapolis-based National Institute on Media and the Family.

He points out that one habit doesn't necessarily predict another; boys who didn't meet the requirements for physical activity but did for television viewing were still 2 1/2 times more likely to be overweight.

Adds Laurson, lead author of the study to be published in an upcoming issue of the Journal of Pediatrics: "These guidelines can help [parents] put their child in perspective -- which group would they fall in? Perhaps it could be a motivating factor." He's in favor of using pedometers too: "Physical activity is hard to measure, especially in children, and I think measuring steps taken per day is easy to interpret and a great place to start."

Dr. Teri Metcalf McCambridge, chairman of the academy's council on sports medicine and fitness, agrees. "Walking is one of those things that even if you're heavy, you can do it." And she doesn't think that target number of steps is excessive: "Kids probably used to walk that much going to and from school and playing during recess. America as a society now is not walking that much."

jeannine.stein@latimes.com