

The cancer timebomb: Parents sentencing their children to disease by letting them sit in front of TV and computer screens for hours on end, warn experts

- **Children should only be allowed two hours screen time a day, doctors warn**
- **They are 'increasingly concerned' about children being too inactive**
- **Those who spend hours playing games, surfing internet and watching TV risk developing diabetes, cancer and heart disease**

By Anna Hodgekiss

Millions of parents are putting their children at risk of cancer because they let them spend too long sitting – either watching TV, playing computer games or surfing the internet.

Doctors have today delivered a stark warning that a generation of youngsters is also at risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes because of their sedentary lifestyles.

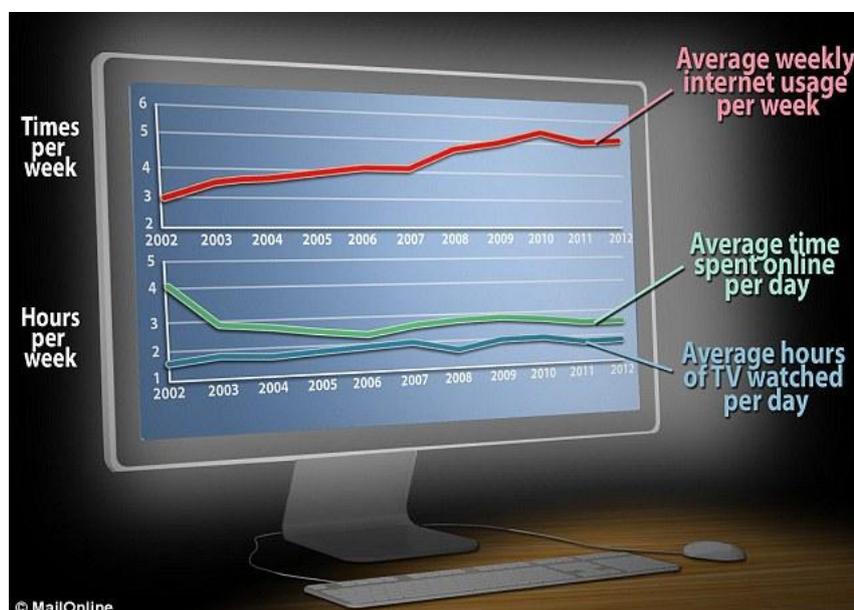
Even more worrying is that children who do exercise regularly are still at risk, because long periods of inactivity could still lead to obesity.



Parents are being urged to only let children sit in front of a screen for under two hours a day to cut the risk of health problems in later life (posed by model)

Experts have now urged parents to limit the amount of time children spend being sedentary to two hours a day.

But a 2011 study by the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) found that the average child in the UK is already exceeding this by watching more than two-and-a-half-hours of television and surfing the internet for an hour and 50 minutes a day.



The amount of time children spend sitting in front of screens has soared in the last decade

Dr Rachel Thompson, deputy head of science at the World Cancer Research Fund told MailOnline that even if children exercise, they can still develop dangerous bad habits if they are allowed to spend hours a day inactive.

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- Government blasted for spending £2m on Morph-style Change4Life health adverts that warn against fast food
- Desperate to beat the bulge? Why a calorie-counting mobile app could be the recipe for success

She said: 'We know that being physically active as a child means you're more likely to continue to be so as an adult.'

Professor Mitch Blair of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health told the Daily Mirror that children are 'exposed to screens' more than ever before.



Inactive children have higher risks of developing cancer, diabetes and heart disease (posed by model)

He said: 'We are becoming increasingly concerned that this encourages a more sedentary lifestyle', adding that screen time should be limited to no more than two hours a day.

The research agency Childwise says children spent an average of 5.9 hours a day in front of the TV, a games console or a compute.

And just last month, the latest NHS figures revealed that a third of final year primary school children are overweight or obese.

The exact mechanism of how being sedentary causes cancer is still relatively unknown. But it's thought that physical activity decreases the risk of cancer by reducing inflammation in the body – which is linked to developing the condition, Dr Thompson said.

Being active also reduces body fat – it's known that obese people have higher levels of inflammation in the body – and increases insulin sensitivity, thereby reducing the risk of diabetes.

She added: 'Being overweight also increases levels of certain hormones such as oestrogen, and this has been linked with an increased risk of certain cancers, such as breast.'

Indeed, the most physically active women are 20 per cent less likely to get the disease than their most sedentary counterparts, according to Cancer Research UK.

Furthermore, an increasing body of research is linking a lack of physical activity to between 6 and 10 per cent of all cases of heart disease, type-2 diabetes, and breast and bowel cancer.

The charity says a review of several studies showed a 24 per cent risk reduction for colon cancer in the most versus least active men, and a 21 per cent risk reduction in the most active women.

Physical activity may affect colon cancer risk in various ways, including the time it takes for waste to pass through the body, inflammation and insulin resistance and hormone levels.

Being more active also reduces the risk of endometrial cancer by 30 per cent. Last year, Britain was labelled one of the most sedentary populations on Earth, with almost twice the proportion of people defined as 'inactive' as in neighbouring France.

SO HOW MUCH EXERCISE SHOULD CHILDREN BE DOING?

Physical activity recommendations for people in the UK were updated in July 2011, as follows:

UNDER 5'S: After beginning to walk, under-fives should be physically active for at least 180 minutes per day

AGE 5-18: At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. Vigorous intensity activities that strengthen muscle and bone - e.g. impact exercise such as running/netball/dancing/skipping - should be carried out on at least three days a week

ADULTS 19+: At least 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity over a week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more. Physical activity to improve muscle strength should be carried out on at least two days per week.