

Take the TV out of your children's bedroom so they can sleep properly, say researchers

- **More than half of 9-11 year olds admitted to using gadgets when they were supposed to be asleep**

Children who bask in the night-time glow of a TV or computer don't get enough rest and suffer from poor lifestyle habits, new research from the University of Alberta has shown.

Researchers found that children with one or more electronic devices in the bedroom, TVs, computers, video games and mobile phones, were far more likely to be overweight or obese.

'If you want your kids to sleep better and live a healthier lifestyle, get the technology out of the bedroom,' said co-author Professor Paul Veugelers.



Researchers say that letting children have a TV or even smartphone in their room could be affecting their sleep, and their health.

HOW MANY ARE AFFECTED?

Researchers found half of the students had a TV, DVD player or video game console in their bedroom. 21 per cent had a computer and 17 per cent had a mobile phone, while five per cent of students had all three types of devices.

Veugelers, director of the Population Health Intervention Research Unit, said the research is the first to connect the dots on the relationship between sleep, diet and physical activity among kids.

Nearly 3,400 Grade 5 students aged 9-11 were asked about their nighttime sleep habits and access to electronics through the REAL Kids Alberta survey.

Half of the students had a TV, DVD player or video game console in their bedroom, 21 per cent had a computer and 17 per cent had a mobile phone.

Five per cent of students had all three types of devices.

57 per cent of students reported using electronics after they were supposed to be asleep, with watching TV and movies being the most popular activity.

Twenty-seven per cent of students engaged in three or more activities after bedtime. Researchers found that students with access to one electronic device were 1.47 times as likely to be overweight as kids with no devices in the bedroom.



A brother, aged 4, and sister, aged 1, play with an iPad and iPhone. Researchers today said that giving children access to electronics at night is disrupting their sleep patterns.

That increased to 2.57 times for kids with three devices, with similar results reported among obese children. More sleep also led to significantly more physical activity and better diet choices, researchers found. Co-author Christina Fung noted that children today are not sleeping as much as previous generations, with two-thirds not getting the recommended hours of sleep per night.

In addition to healthy lifestyle habits, a good night's sleep has been linked to better academic outcomes, fewer mood disorders and other positive health outcomes, she said.

'It's important to teach these children at an earlier age and teach them healthy habits when they are younger.'

BRITISH CHILDREN SPENDING MORE TIME ONLINE THAN EVER BEFORE

Children are texting and spending more time online than ever before, according to Ofcom's latest annual report on children's media habits.

Texting is most prolific among 12-15 year olds, who say they are sending an average of 193 texts every week.

This has more than doubled from 12 months ago, when just 91 were sent; and is almost four times as much as the UK average of 50 texts per week.

Older girls (12-15 year olds) are texting significantly more than boys, sending an average of 221 messages a week – 35% more than boys of the same age, who send 164 a week.

The average 8-11 year old sends 41 texts each week, almost double the number (23) sent in 2011.

The new report also reveals the increasing role of the internet in children's lives.

For the first time, 12-15 year olds are spending as much time on the internet as they do watching TV.

These amounts to an estimated 17 hours a week on each activity.

Claudio Pollack, Ofcom's Consumer Group Director, said: 'Ofcom's latest research shows that children's take-up and use of different media is growing at a rapid pace, with some areas such as texting and smartphone ownership fast outstripping the general population.'

'However, children are not just using more media, they are also adopting some forms at a very young age.'

'This highlights the challenge that some parents face in keeping up with their children when it comes to technology and in understanding what they can do to protect children.'