

## Lifewire: Too much TV might lead to learning difficulties later on

by Ven\_Griva

Teens who watch television for three or more hours per day appear to have a higher risk of attention and learning difficulties in their adolescent and adult years, says a report in the May issue of Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

In the United States, children and teenagers watch TV an average of two or more hours per day, the article says. Researchers hypothesize that amount of television watching could be detrimental to learning.

Jeffrey G. Johnson of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and the New York State Psychiatric Institute and colleagues studied more than 650 families. The parents and children from these families were interviewed about TV habits and school problems three times between 1983 and 1993, when the children were 14, 16 and 22 years old.

At age 14, 33.2 percent of the teens reported that they watched TV three or more hours per day.

Between 2001 and 2004, when the children in the study had reached an average age of 33, they were interviewed about their high school and college educations, including whether they graduated from high school or attended college.

Excessive TV viewing at age 14 and beyond was associated with:

- Poor grades.
- Attention difficulties.
- Boredom at school.
- Failure to complete class assignment.
- Failure to complete homework.

- Negative attitudes about school.
- Academic failure in high school.
- Dropping out.
- Failure to seek education beyond high school.

Overall, the findings have important preventive implications, the authors say.

"They suggest that by encouraging youths to spend less than three hours per day watching television, parents, teachers and health care professionals may be able to help reduce the likelihood that at-risk adolescents will develop persistent attention and learning difficulties," Johnson and the authors conclude.

## LIGHTING UP

Tobacco advertising in retail stores appears to be linked to teens experimenting with cigarette smoking, while promotional giveaways and price breaks could be associated with the transition of youth to regular smoking, says a report in the May issue of Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

Research has found that taking up smoking at a young age is associated with eventually smoking more cigarettes per day and a higher risk of long-term consequences such as lung cancer, the article says.

Cigarette marketing that appeals to young people, including ads that use cartoon characters, were banned as part of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with tobacco companies. Evidence suggests the tobacco industry might be turning to retail stores for their marketing efforts.

"In fact, in 2003, the tobacco industry spent \$14.2 billion on retail advertising and price and other promotions, which accounts for 94 percent of all its 2003 advertising and promotional spending," the article says.

Sandy J. Slater of the Institute for Health Research and Policy at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and colleagues analyzed data from more than 26,000 students in grades eight, 10 and 12 surveyed from 1999 to 2003.

Based on survey findings, students were divided into levels of smoking uptake. Levels ranged from "puffers," those who have smoked once or twice, to "established smokers," who either smoked regularly at the time of the survey or smoked regularly in the recent past.

The students came from nearly 1,000 communities where researchers gathered cigarette marketing data. Researchers visited up to 30 retail locations to evaluate the types and frequency of tobacco ads, the availability of promotions, such as coupons and gifts with purchase, and the price of a pack of cigarettes.

Researchers found:

- 53.7 of students had never smoked.
  
- 20.7 percent were puffers
  
- 11.5 percent were current established smokers.
  
- The remainder had smoked tobacco in the past.
  
- Higher levels of advertising, lower cigarette prices and greater availability of cigarette promotions were associated with smoking uptake.
  
- Advertising increased the likelihood that youths would take up smoking.
  
- Price influenced the likelihood of smoking at most levels of uptake.

- Promotions increased the likelihood that adolescents would move from experimentation to regular smoking."

Based on study estimates, the authors predict that if stores had no advertising, there would be a relative decline of about 11 percent in puffers. They conclude eliminating promotions would result in a relative decline of about 13 percent in established smokers.

## WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

Two recent studies by researchers at Dartmouth Medical School cast light on the impact movies have in influencing teens to smoke.

The studies show that movies deliver billions of smoking impressions to U.S. teens.

In a report published May 7 in *Pediatrics*, "Exposure to Movie Smoking Among U.S. Adolescents Aged 10 to 14 Years: A Population Estimate," Dr. James Sargent and co-authors, researchers at Norris Cotton Cancer Center studied 6,522 U.S. adolescents 10 to 14 years old. The researchers assessed their exposure to 534 popular contemporary box-office hits.

Three out of four movies studied contained smoking, a total of 3,830 smoking images. Based on the number of adolescents seeing each movie and the smoking contained in each, researchers estimated that these movies delivered 13.9 billion smoking impressions.

Sixty-one percent of the impressions were delivered by youth-rated movies. Of the group of movies surveyed, some 30 of the movies delivered more than 100 million smoking impressions each. Many of these high-impact movies were rated PG-13.

"The apparently free delivery of star smoking to a young teen population is a tobacco marketer's dream," Sargent said.

Thirty top stars, mostly male, delivered more than 25 percent of the total smoking images.

"If just one of these popular stars decided to quit smoking in movies it would make a major difference on adolescent exposure," said Dr. Susanne Tanski, one of the authors.

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