



Live Well, Work Well

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TEENS AND SCREEN TIME

According to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), the amount of time teens spend using electronics (e.g., scrolling on social media or watching TV) may be linked to higher rates of depression.

Details of the Study

The JAMA study involved over 3,800 students in seventh to 11th grade from 2012 to 2018. Over the course of six years, the students completed surveys to find out more information regarding how much time they're on their phones or watching TV. For example, the survey asked students how much time per day they spent using social media or the computer, watching TV or playing video games to determine the extent of their screen time.

The surveys also asked questions regarding symptoms of depression. To measure depression symptoms, the surveys asked students to rate the extent to which they experienced known symptoms of depression—such as feelings of sadness or hopelessness—on a scale from zero (not at all) to four (very much).

Study Findings

The following are some key findings from the study:

- **Social media usage**—The study revealed that each one-hour increase in the average time spent on social media was associated with higher feelings of depression symptoms. The study's researchers also found that high usage of social media over four years was associated with increased depression.

- **TV and computer usage**— For teens who already watched a lot of TV or used the computer frequently, there wasn't an increase in depression symptoms over the course of four years. However, similar to the social media usage findings, the severity of depression symptoms increased for each one-hour increase in the average amount of time spent watching TV or using the computer.
- **Video game usage**—The study did not find any significant associations between video game usage and depression symptoms.

The study's researchers point out that, while this study gives valuable insight into the general effects of screen time on a teen's mental health, further research is needed to see if specific social media apps or genres of television are more problematic than others.

What can you do?

Helping your child focus on their mental health is extremely important, especially during their teen years. However, banning screen time use altogether isn't the answer. Experts recommend setting consistent daily screen-time limits for your teen. For more information, talk to your teen's doctor.



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