

It's Official:

TV Linked to Attention Deficit

babies and toddlers parked in front of the TV have a much higher risk of developing ADHD by age 7, a new study shows

by Jean Lotus

A study from the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that watching videos as a toddler may lead to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD, also called ADD in UK) in later life.

TV watching "rewires" an infant's brain, says Dr. Dimitri A. Christakis lead researcher and director of the Child Health Institute at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center, Seattle, Wash. The damage shows up at age 7 when children have difficulty paying attention in school.

"In contrast to the way real life unfolds and is experienced by young children, the pace of TV is greatly sped up." says Christakis. His research appears in the April 2004 issue of Pediatrics. Quick scene shifts of video images become "normal," to a baby "when in fact, it's decidedly not normal or natural." Christakis says. Exposing a baby's developing brain to videos may overstimulate it, causing permanent changes in developing neural pathways.

"Also in question is whether the insistent noise of television in the home may interfere with the development of 'inner speech' by which a child learns to think through problems and plans and restrain impulsive responding," wrote Jane Healy, psychologist and child brain expert in the magazine's commentary.

Babies brains grow rapidly

Even a child playing with its own fingers has the neural patterning that comes from bending, flexing, stretching and grasping. Scientists tell us that the brain develops in completely unique ways between birth and three years. As a kiddie viddie baby sits "mesmerized", neural paths are not being created. This is crucial brain development that stops by age three.

"You don't want to think that something as innocent as half-an-hour's peace and quiet could reduce your kid's chances later in life," says Claire Eaton, 27-year-old mother from Lewisham, Australia.

Setting up baby for failure in school

Are parents who use infant videos such as "Baby Einstein" and "Teletubbies" putting their child at risk for a lifetime of Special Ed classes, school "behavioral therapy" and Ritalin?

In the study of more than 2,000 children, Christakis found that for every hour watched at age one and age three, the children had almost a ten percent higher chance of developing attention problems that could be diagnosed as ADHD by age 7. A toddler watching three hours of infant television daily had nearly a 30 percent higher chance of having attention problems in school.

Infant videos: They wouldn't sell them if they were dangerous --Would they?

An explosion of kidvids for the bouncy chair set has hit the market. These include Baby Einstein, Baby Mozart, So Smart etc. TV shows, such as Teletubbies, aim at 18-month-old toddlers. These videos are peddled as "educational tools" to "give your baby a head start." The truth is, they are a video-tether that keeps baby out from underfoot.

"Max is learning German right now from a video"

Parents take away crucial life experiences from their child every time they pop in Baby Einstein. But they do love how it takes the baby out of their hair for awhile Listen to what parents say in testimonials about infant videos:

"I love spending time with my boy but let's face it, there are times when you just have to have 10 minutes or so to yourself so that you can wash the dishes or do laundry; that's when you pop this video in. It's 25 minutes of entertainment that holds the attention of even very young children. ," (son 10 months) Chris Hudson from San Antonio, TX.

There are times I rewind it and play it again and again until I get the dishes done and order restored. My son is captivated (and hopefully learning something). Mom I n Connecticut

The only thing I wish is that the videos were longer than 30min. Melissa Perruzzi, Clinton Mississippi

(From Baby Einstein reviews on Amazon.com).

Big problem for little people

Twenty-six percent of US children younger than age two have TV in their bedrooms - often watched from the crib, and 36 percent of families leave the TV on almost all of the time, even when no one is watching, according to a 2000 Kaiser Family Foundation study.

Don't put your child at risk!

The good news is, infants and toddlers don't need television to distract them. Humans raised children for 50,000 years before television sets and you can do it too. Your children can learn to entertain themselves or play with your supervision.

"When one-year olds are playing with a toy, they can explore it, poke at it, drop it," says Yale University Television Researcher Dorothy Singer. "They're learning about space, about sound, and they're developing sense of competence. Watching a TV show just doesn't provide the same sensory experience."

Leaving a child alone with the TV is never a good idea.

"Would you entrust you toddler into the care of a baby sitter, even for a few minutes, who cannot hear or see your child?" writes Nancy Hall of Yale University's Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy. "Would you leave your child in an environment that encourages passivity, limits creativity and results in increased aggressive behavior? Many 1-year-olds are spending time regularly with just such a baby sitter: the television set."

What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

ADHD affects 12 percent of US school children and has increased dramatically over the past 50 years. Studies show ADHD increased with the introduction of children's television in the 1950s and then spiked higher in the mid 1980s when VCRs and home video became commonplace. Although the condition is known to be genetic, scientists have noted its rapid spread throughout every social class of children, and guessed that there could be an environmental cause. TV watching is a cause, this study shows.

How much TV should I let my baby watch?

No child under age two should watch television at all, the Academy of American Pediatrics advised in 1998. Doctors blame TV for increasing aggression and obesity in children, now they add ADHD risk to early TV use.