

Why TV is good for children

For better or worse, M loves watching TV. Every Sunday, we sit on the bed and watch Saturday Night Live. It's her favorite show and I can always count on her bouncing (on my stomach!) and dancing to the musical guests, sometimes grabbing my nose for balance. Her father and I joke that exposing her to television is child abuse – it's a controversial subject. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of two be kept completely isolated from television, but not necessarily other screen types. There is a fear that it hinders a child's social development and increases the risk of obesity. They also suggest that TV be limited to only 1-2 hours a day for teenagers and older children. It's not surprising – children watching TV are less likely to be doing exercise or other similar activities. But could the content be more of a factor than the act of watching TV?

A [study](#) by the American Journal of Public Health suggests the content is more of a risk than the act of TV watching in and of itself. The study advocates that the time children spend watching commercials was tied with an increase in obesity, but the time spent on the programming itself was not. In fact, children spend an average of 30 hours each year watching commercials pushing for food – 95% of those are for foods that have no nutritional value. Perhaps it's no surprise that children are becoming more obese! Likewise, a study in [Psychology of Popular Media Culture](#) looked at a variety of different types of content and found that the type of content had more of an effect on children than the act of watching TV. Children who watched shows that demonstrated generosity and altruism were more likely to reflect those traits – likewise, children who watched violent programming were more likely to act out. And, interestingly enough, even in this study, the content of commercials was more impactful than the content of the TV shows being watched. [Pediatrics](#) gives some insight as to why this may be. Children under the age of 13 cannot filter out the mechanisms used to promote buying habits the way adults can. Pair that with the flashy techniques of commercials and they end up being more affected by the commercials than the content itself.

It's probably still not a great idea to let kids watch TV for hours at a time, but a little here and there, sans commercials, probably won't do any harm.

We'll still be letting M watch her favorite shows, even ones that perhaps aren't meant for children, such as SNL. I'm positive that I'll suffer through some more punches, kicks and episodes of being a replacement for a trampoline. But, I'll probably let her watch these shows in a situation where I can control the amount of commercials she sees. The way she's going, maybe one day she'll be a comedian.