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## Know! How Your Child's Health Habits Rank



Parenting requires a daily balancing act—especially when it comes to raising tweens and teens. According to newly released research from the University of Texas Health Science Center, many of us should reexamine the health habits of our children (as well as our own) and help to make some adjustments. After studying the lifestyles of more than 60,000 American high school students, they found that only 1 in 20 young people are getting the recommended combined amount of sleep, exercise, and screen time.

“The combined effect on children’s overall health could be considerable in terms of their physical health, emotional well-being, and academic performance,” said Gregory Knell, Ph. D., a postdoctoral research fellow at UTHealth School of Public Health in Dallas.

### So what exactly are the recommended amounts?

**SLEEP:** 9–12 hours for 10 to 12-year-olds; and 8–10 hours for 14 to 18-year-olds (National Sleep Foundation).

**EXERCISE:** At least one hour of moderate or vigorous physical activity daily (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

**SCREEN TIME:** No more than two hours in a 24-hour period (American Academy of Pediatrics).

Researchers said meeting the recommendations for the combined behaviors may have a greater association with overall health outcomes than meeting any one recommendation by itself.

The study found that among teens who are least likely to get the recommended amount of sleep, exercise, and screen time, are teens who are older, non-Hispanic black, Asian, obese, and who showed signs of depression. Only three percent of girls, compared to seven percent of boys, were reaching all three recommendations.

### What can we do to reverse this trend and improve our children’s lifestyle behaviors?



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**SCREEN TIME:** When it comes to screen time, a mere two-hour limit may seem nearly impossible considering teens rack up an average six hours of entertainment media each day. That doesn't include time spent using media for school and homework.

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As for adults, a study by global tech company Asurion found that the average American checks their phone every 12 minutes. That means we have our faces buried in our phones up to 80 times a day, and for some that number is even higher. This is where adjusting our own media use will role model positive behavior for our children. One option can be to set limits on our children's devices to limit their screen time. If we agree to cut down media use along with them, it is likely to have a greater impact long-term.

**EXERCISE:** The recommended one hour or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily for youth specifically includes three types of exercise: Aerobic (like jogging and bicycling), muscle-strengthening (like unstructured play on park equipment and any kind of bodyweight exercises such as pull ups or planks), and bone-strengthening (like basketball and tennis).

Activity guidelines for adults say that those who sit less and engage in any amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity will reap some benefits. For substantial health benefits, adults are recommended to include at least 2.5 hours of moderate activity weekly or 1.25 hours of vigorous activity weekly.

Our children need exercise, and we need exercise. This is another opportunity to role model positive behavior while improving our own health as well. Invite your child to join you on a jog or play basketball with them; even seeing you heading to the gym regularly is positive role modeling. In any case, your actions will be more powerful than words alone.

**SLEEP:** When it comes to the list of reasons why your child needs to be getting their recommended hours of sleep and how best to achieve quality sleep, the list is long. [Click here to visit the previous tip. Know! Sleep is Fuel for Life, for the specifics.](#)

In reference to the findings of the University of Texas Health Science Center, Knell says, "The results are a wake-up call for everyone who wants to make sure our children have a healthy future."

With that in mind, you are encouraged to take a closer look at your health habits, as well as those of your children, and take positive steps towards better well-being.

Sources: [JAMA Pediatrics. Gregory Knell, PhD; Casey P. Durand, PhD; Harold W. Kohl III, PhD; et al: Prevalence and Likelihood of Meeting Sleep, Physical Activity, and Screen-Time Guidelines Among US Youth. Feb. 4, 2019. New York Post: Americans check their phones 80 times a day: study. Nov. 8 2017. Science Daily: Teens +too low on sleep, activity, and too high on-screen time. Feb. 4, 2019. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.](#)