

Active video games are actually better for kids than watching TV, study finds

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Angry Birds is actually better for your children than Big Bird, study finds. Source: PerthNow

IF it's a choice between sticking your child in front of the TV to get an hour's peace, and giving them a game to play, a new study has found that video gaming is actually far better for young children than passive TV watching.

That means Singstar or Angry Birds beats out Big Bird or The Wiggles any day.

Active video gaming is actually better for children than watching television, a Queensland study has revealed.

Researchers in the Games Research and Interactive Design Lab at the Queensland University of Technology examined the effects of gaming (on mobiles, consoles and computers) and television on children between the ages of two and five and found that they expended more energy when they were gaming than when they watched TV.

Dr Penny Sweetser, lead researcher on the project told News.com.au that the scientists were able to distinguish two distinct kinds of screen time - passive screen time, where you are passively receiving media, like when you watch TV, and active screen time, where you are engaging both your mind and your body.

"The amount of energy that was expended by children playing video games was found to be much higher than the energy expended when they watched television," she said.

"Higher blood pressure was also associated with television watching, but not PC or video gaming."

The results almost directly contradict The Federal Government's recommendations for the amount of time children should spend in front of screens.

The government recommends that children between the ages of two and five spend a maximum of one hour "screen time" per day.

However, the QUT study found that 74-90 per cent of children exceeded that recommendation.

It found children in that age range were spending two to three hours watching TV, but only half an hour playing games.

Dr Sweetser said that the Federal Government doesn't make the distinction between passive viewing of television as opposed to the more interactive use of video games.

She said she hoped the team's research "would help to inform the Federal Government's future recommendations and make them a bit more useful."

"And perhaps it will make them a bit more realistic for parents to understand the different effects of engaging in different types of screen time and helping them choose how kids should spend their time."

The researcher said she and her team tried several times to contact the Department of Health and Aging but said "they were not very helpful".

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Aging told News.com.au that the National Physical Activity Recommendations for Children 0-5 Years were published in 2011 to provide guidance in relation to physical activity, sedentary behaviour (sitting) and television viewing for young children.

"These recommendations were based on the best available evidence at the time and included an extensive consultation process with both professionals and parents," the spokesperson said.

"The Government recognises this is an area of research which is growing and new research is continually emerging. This is why the physical activity guidelines are updated on a 5 yearly basis. Currently, the physical activity guidelines for children (5-12 years), young people (13-17 years) and adults (18-64 years) are being revised to reflect the more recent research in this area. "

So are we moving towards a time when video games might actually be a recommended form of physical activity? Have your say in the comments below.
