

Viewpoint Digital 'near work' usage (AJN, NVK, V&VN)

The use of digital screens, such as tablets, computers, laptops and mobile telephones dominate our community lifestyle. Despite the unmistakable advantages, professionals and researchers signal many health risks. The professional associations of preventive youth health care physicians (AJN), pediatricians (NVK) and preventive youth health care nurses (V&VN) contend managing healthy screen use. It is of utmost importance that the professionals consider the family situation, age of the child/youth as well as the screen use of parents. Guidelines for the uniform use on a balanced proper load on the musculoskeletal system are relevant not only for school-going youth but also in occupational health guidelines for sedentary occupations. Discussing screen use is a task for all health professionals. In this document, the most important health risks for child and youth health regarding screen use have been collected.

Keypoints (health risks)¹

- There is a steep increase in worldwide myopia (near-sightedness) among the youth. Lifestyle factors like less outdoor activities and more near-vision activities during which the child looks at objects nearby – for example mobile phones – are important risk factors.
- Extreme screentime at a young age is associated with problems in language, cognition and psychosocial functions.
- Screentime is often associated with decreased physical activity, which again results in poorer aerobic fitness (endurance). Similarly, regular physical activity is necessary to reduce the body mass index (BMI) in the case of children who are overweight or obese. Regular physical activity also stimulates an active lifestyle later in life.
- Children and youth who are subjected to increased screentime have a reduced sleep duration and more often sleep problems. This again could lead to problems in concentration and poorer school performance.
- Approximately five percent of the youth have a problematic internet usage. This group has to be monitored carefully and specialized professional help might be needed.

Tips for professionals in the consultation rooms

- Ask specifically about screen use and complaints like headaches, sleep problems, visual complaints, back and neck pain, vague complaints like fatigue etc.
- Explain to parents and youth the possible physical consequences of extreme screen use.
- Advise a minimum of two hours of outdoor physical activity per day/ activity according to the 20-20-2 guideline: after 20 minutes of screen use, 20 seconds of looking in the distance, and 2 hours of outdoor activities.
- Youth public health physicians/nurses: ask schools whether they stimulate outdoor lessons/breaks.
- Show parents the NJI tips on screen use on their site (Toolbox media upbringing)
[\[https://www.nji.nl/nl/Kennis/Dossier/Mediaopvoeding/Toolbox-Mediaopvoeding\]](https://www.nji.nl/nl/Kennis/Dossier/Mediaopvoeding/Toolbox-Mediaopvoeding)

¹A joint effort of Dutch professional associations, (pediatricians 'NVK', Preventive Child Health care physicians 'AJN' and Preventive Health care nurses 'V&VN'), and several allied professionals from Erasmus MC, NN, Trimbos, TNO, NCJ, NJi and Amsterdam UMC among others resulted in a position paper. The paper in Dutch is to be found on the websites of the AJN and NVK.

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