Screen Use During Meals Among Young Children: Exploration of Associated Variables

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## Authors

Jusienė R.;Urbonas V.;Laurinaitytė I.;Rakickienė L.;Breidokienė R.;Kuzminskaitė M.;Praninskienė R.

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Internet usage, practices and engagement

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847 children aged 2 to 5 years old (51.5% boys) were analysed in this study.

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

Background and Objectives: There is evidence that eating meals or snacks while watching TV is an obesogenic factor. Moreover, the patterns of TV and other screen use during meals begin early and persist. However, there are only a few studies to date which address the prevalence and predictors of young children’s exposure to screen during mealtimes. Thus, the present study aimed to investigate the prevalence and the associated factors of screen use during meals in early childhood. Materials and Methods: A cross sectional survey was conducted in Lithuania. Data of 847 children aged 2 to 5 years old (51.5% boys) were analyzed in this study. Parents completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/1½-5) and reported their children’s daily screen time, exposure to background TV, screen use during child’s meals, child and parental height and weight, and sociodemographic data. Results: More than half of children were exposed to screen during meals: 33.7% occasionally, several times per week or per month, and 22%—daily or during every meal. Overall daily screen time, background TV, consumption of junk food, child age, and emotional and behavioral problems were related to mealtime screen use (all associations significant at p < 0.01). Longer daily screen time (OR 1.01; 95% CI 1.00–1.01), more background TV (OR 1.26; 95% CI 1.10–1.45), and elder child age (OR 1.02; 95% CI 1.00–1.03) were significant predictors of occasional use of screen during meals. Also, longer daily screen time (OR 0.99; 95% CI 0.98–0.99), background TV (OR 0.78; 95% CI 0.66–0.91) together with no siblings’ status of a child (OR 0.42; 95% CI 0.25–0.69) increased the probability that children were fed in front of screens daily. Conclusions: This study confirmed the unfavorable associations among screen use during meals, daily screen time and junk food consumption in early childhood. In addition, first-time parents should get particular health providers’ attention as they are more likely to use screens during child’s mealtime.

# Outcome

More than half of children were exposed to screen during meals: 33.7% occasionally, several times per week or per month, and 22%—daily or during every meal. Overall daily screen time, background TV, consumption of junk food, child age, and emotional and behavioral problems were related to mealtime screen use (all associations significant at p