

## More structure, fewer screens makes for healthier kids in the school holidays

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*Source:* University of South Australia

*Summary:* In the first Australian study of its kind, University of South Australia researchers found that when primary school children are on holidays, they're less active, more likely to be on screens, and tend to have a worse diet than during the school term.

### FULL STORY

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Vacation care, sports programs, or performing arts -- whatever your child's interests, researchers say that adding structure to the school holiday is a great way to keep kids healthy and active over the break.

In the first Australian study of its kind, University of South Australia researchers found that when primary school children are on holidays, they're less active, more likely to be on screens, and tend to have a worse diet than during the school term.

Assessing responses for 358 primary school students (Grade 4 and 5), researchers found that on holidays, children were likely to be 12 minutes less active each day, 27 minutes more sedentary, and have more than an hour extra of screen time.

During the school holidays, children (aged 9-10) spent 39 per cent more time using screens than during the school year.

UniSA researcher Dr Amanda Watson says children exercise less and eat more unhealthy food during the holidays, which may contribute to accelerated weight gain and poor health.

"Everyone is excited when school holidays come around -- it's a break from the daily routine, classrooms, and getting ready on time -- but despite the obvious benefits, it can have some setback for kids," Dr Watson says.

"Our study shows that during school holidays, children are more likely to display unhealthy behaviours, such as being less active, spending more time sitting, eating more junk food, and (perhaps unsurprisingly) watching a whole lot more TV or screens.

"Of course, it is important for children to get some quality downtime over the school break, but it's equally important that they stay active and get enough exercise.

"If we add more structure to children's days in the holidays -- regular activities, planned lunch and snack breaks, as well as a limit on the amount of screen time kids have -- we could encourage healthier behaviours to benefit them now and in the future."

In Australia, one in four children (25 per cent) are overweight or obese, contributing to poorer health and wellbeing, as well as worse performance at school.

Senior researcher UniSA's Professor Carol Maher says that screen time is one of the biggest risk factors for children's inactivity.

"Managing screen time is a challenge for many parents, and not only in the holidays," Prof Maher says.

"Being inactive for extended periods, either watching TV or playing games, is not good for anyone's health, not the least children.

"So, when research shows us that even one extra hour of screen time a day corresponds with a 13 per cent increased risk of obesity, it is time to rethink computer time.

"Everyone can benefit from being more active. These holidays could be just what you need to make more positive changes to you and your children's activity levels, overall wellbeing, and health."