

# TECHNOLOGY CAN WAIT

In a plugged-in society, children need parents to set limits



John Hutton, MD, a pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's and owner of blue manatee children's bookstore and decafé, has written a series of "Baby Unplugged" books, celebrating "old-school" experiences and icons of childhood.

Many parents feel that their children are constantly plugged in to video games, computers or cell phones that seem to be permanently affixed to their palms.

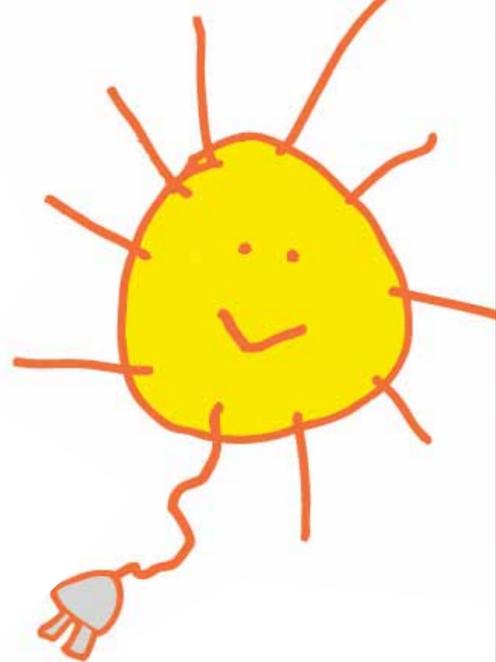
If you're wondering if all that techno time is unhealthy, you have reason to be concerned.

"Electronic media are not only an inferior means for children to experience and learn about their world, they can be toxic," says John Hutton, MD, a part-time pediatrician at

Cincinnati Children's and owner of blue manatee children's bookstore and decafé, in Oakley.

The average child, 8 through 18, now engages in screen-based media more than seven hours a day. Factor in the time spent texting, using a personal computer or camping out in front of a flat-screen TV, and your child may be racking up a whopping 11 hours of screen time daily.

The use of electronic media now starts, on average, at just



9 months of age. Most children under the age of 2 watch more than three hours of television daily, despite guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics that discourage it.

As a result, childhood is being vastly transformed from the days of running around outside with imagination taking the lead, to an experience largely dictated by media companies and software developers.

Despite claims that many products will give your children a competitive edge, Hutton says there is no scientific evidence to support the idea. He has launched a blog at [www.BabyUnplugged.com](http://www.BabyUnplugged.com) promoting healthy alternatives, with a mission to "keep kids screen-free until 3."

"We need to really reinforce how important it is that parents and kids spend time together, reading together, playing together," Hutton says, "and how that interaction can never be outsourced to any device."

#### The ill effects of too much screen time include:

- Increased likelihood of childhood obesity and aggression
- Development of a habit difficult to break, especially as children get older
- Interference with sleep
- Development of behavioral problems
- Impaired academic performance
- Fragmentation of the family
- Decreased socialization skills

**WATCH ONLINE** to hear pediatrician and children's bookstore owner John Hutton, MD, discuss getting back to what's really important, at [www.cincinnatichildrens.org/story](http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/story)



The physician-owned blue manatee children's bookstore and decafé offers story times and activities for kids.

## DECLARE A TECHNO TIMEOUT

- Limit screen time: The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages screen time for kids younger than 2 and calls for limiting older kids to one to two hours of quality programming a day.
- Don't permit children to have a TV in their room or to watch it in the car.
- Keep the TV off during meals.
- Have a techno turn-in time at night, where kids hand over their laptops and cell phones to ensure homework gets finished and they get enough sleep.
- Have at least one technology-free day a week or limit it to weekends.
- Take frequent trips to bookstores and libraries and read regularly to your child.
- Make techno time something children need to earn rather than a given.
- Block channels you don't want your children to watch (see your cable provider's website for instructions).
- Rediscover nature and quality family time by spending time hiking and cycling at local forest preserves.