Diabetes WARNING: Increased risk for kids spending three hours a day watching screens

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CHILDREN who spend three hours or more a day watching TV and staring at their phones and iPads could be at greater risk of developing diabetes, new research suggests.

British researchers found a link between increased screen time and several risk factors associated with diabetes, including higher body fat levels and insulin resistance.

Previous studies have shown adults who spend long periods of time glued to screens have an increased risk of gaining weight and developing type 2 diabetes.

More than one in 16 people in the UK have diabetes.

But now new research suggests children who spend too much time in front of screens could also be at risk.

A research team studied a sample of nearly 4,500 9 to10-year-old pupils from 200 primary schools in London, Birmingham and Leicester.

The scientists looked for a series of metabolic and cardiovascular risk factors.

They looked for blood fats, insulin resistance, fasting blood glucose levels, inflammatory chemicals, blood pressure and body fat.

They also studied adiposity, which describes total body fat, and, crucially, insulin resistance, which occurs when cells fail to respond to insulin, the hormone produced by the pancreas to control levels of blood glucose.

The kids were also asked about their daily screen time, including TV, computers and game consoles.

Only four per cent of the kids said they never spent any time staring at screens, while just over a third (37 per cent) said they spent an hour or less on it.

And just over a quarter (28 per cent) said they clocked up 1-2 hours, while 13 per cent said their daily tally was 2-3 hours.

Meanwhile one in five (18 per cent) said they spent more than three hours in front of screens each days.

The research, published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood, revealed a fifth of boys (22 per cent) spend more than three hours of day on screen time.

This compared to only 14 per cent of girls spending the same amount of time in front of screens.

Also spending more than three hours were 23 per cent of African-Caribbean kids compared with their white European (16 per cent) or South Asian peers (16 per cent).

A link was found between screen time and ponderal index, an indicator of weight in relation to height, and skinfold thickness and fat mass, all indicators of total body fat.

These levels were all higher in children reporting more than three hours of daily screen time than in those who said they spent an hour or less on it.

The associations remained significant even after taking account of factors, such as household income, family background, puberty stage, and physical activity levels.

The researchers also found a strong link between a daily quota of three or more hours of screen time and levels of leptin, the hormone that controls appetite, fasting glucose and insulin resistance.

Study author author Dr Claire Nightingale, from St George's college at the University of London, said: "Our findings suggest that reducing screen time may be beneficial in reducing type 2 diabetes risk factors, in both boys and girls and in different ethnic groups from an early age.

"This is particularly relevant, given rising levels of type 2 diabetes, the early emergence of type 2 diabetes risk, and recent trends suggesting that screen time related activities are increasing in childhood and may pattern screen-related behaviours in later life."