**WEIGHT WATCHERS**

**Kids who spend three hours a day watching telly or playing video games ‘flirting with diabetes’**

By Shaun Wooller

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Children who spend a long time in front of screens get fatter and their bodies are less able to control blood sugar levels

**KIDS who spend more than three hours a day glued to computer games are flirting with diabetes, scientists warn.**

The same is true for children who watch too much telly or who sit using their smartphones for extended periods, a study found.

18% of kids spend more than three hours a day in front of a screen

The link between screen time and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes is because kids get fatter and their bodies are less able to control blood sugar levels.

The connection was exposed in a study conducted by the University of London, of 4,495 pupils aged nine and ten at 200 schools. Those spending three hours or more in front of screens — almost one in five — were heavier and had increased body fat.

Boys were more likely than girls to say they spent 3 or more hours on screen time, as were African-Caribbean kids compared with their white European or South Asian peers.

Weight to height ratios and skinfold thickness were all higher in those who spent three or more hours a day in front of a screen than those who spent an hour or less.

There was also a link with blood sugar levels, leptin — the hormone that controls appetite — and insulin resistance.

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All are key risk factors for type 2 diabetes, which can be warded off by lifestyle changes.

The type 1 form, which is the most common in childhood, cannot be prevented. The University of London’s Dr Claire Nightingale, who led the study, said: “Our findings suggest reducing screen time may be beneficial in reducing type 2 diabetes risk factors.”

Dan Howarth, of Diabetes UK, said: “As a nation, we should all encourage physical activity rather than a sedentary lifestyle for children and adults alike.”

Children should be encouraged to exercise more and eat a healthy diet

He added: “A healthy, balanced diet is also important to reduce the risk of diabetes.”

Dr Justin Warner, from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said: “The finding is an important public health issue as it is potentially modifiable.

“Greater emphasis needs placing on education about the importance of physical activity in all children to reduce the risk of such adverse consequences.”

The findings are published in the journal Archives of Disease in Childhood.