

# **TV-FREE**

***The Awful Truth About Television***



***By Katherine Westphal***

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By Katherine Westphal

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## Fact Sheet: Top 10 Reasons to Become TV-FREE

1. People who watch 3 hours of TV per day are twice as likely to be obese than people who watch less than 1 hour per day.<sup>1</sup>
2. Average US parent spends only 38 min/week in meaningful conversation with children vs. 31½ hours/week watching TV.<sup>2</sup>
3. TV viewing in children at ages one and three is associated with ADHD symptoms at age seven.<sup>3</sup>
4. Viewing TV violence is the single strongest predictor of aggression later in life, according to long-term study.<sup>4</sup>
5. Children witness 16,000 TV murders by age 18.<sup>5</sup>
6. Viewers watch an average 40,000 commercials per year.<sup>6</sup>
7. Commercials aimed at kids influence in an estimated \$300 billion/year in sales via the “Nag Factor”.<sup>7</sup>
8. Students who watched an hour of TV per day or less scored the best on achievement tests.<sup>8</sup>
9. TV is addictive.<sup>9</sup>
10. The average American watches 4 hours 35 minutes of TV per day. There is simply so much else to do in life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LA Tucker and M Bagwell. “Television viewing and obesity in adult females.” Am J Public Health, Jul 1991; 81: 908 - 911.  
LA Tucker and GM Friedman “Television viewing and obesity in adult males” Am J Public Health, Apr 1989; 79: 516 - 518.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tvturnoff.org/images/facts&figs/factsheets/FactsFigs.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/tvaprill.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/0518ero.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.usmayors.org/USCM/us\\_mayor\\_newspaper/documents/10\\_12\\_98/documents/Historic\\_quot\\_National\\_Summit\\_on\\_School\\_Violence\\_and\\_Kids\\_from\\_2\\_00\\_to\\_8\\_00\\_pm\\_quot\\_101998.html](http://www.usmayors.org/USCM/us_mayor_newspaper/documents/10_12_98/documents/Historic_quot_National_Summit_on_School_Violence_and_Kids_from_2_00_to_8_00_pm_quot_101998.html)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.apa.org/releases/childrenads.html>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.biz.colostate.edu/faculty/joec/BG655/Projects\\_Fa01/Marketing%20to%20Kids.htm](http://www.biz.colostate.edu/faculty/joec/BG655/Projects_Fa01/Marketing%20to%20Kids.htm)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tvturnoff.org/images/facts&figs/factsheets/FactsFigs.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=0005339B-A694-1CC5-B4A8809EC588EEDF>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nielsenmedia.com/newsreleases/2005/AvgHoursMinutes92905.pdf>

# Introduction

The Little Box that  
Transformed Society

## What is wrong with TV?

That innocent-looking box in your living room looks harmless enough. The small box is relaxing. It's entertaining. For some people, it is their best friend.

In spite of its innocent appearance, many scientific studies link that harmless-looking box to a large number of modern society's ills. Studies have linked TV with obesity, consumerism, societal violence, attention disorders, the educational crisis, teen sex and pregnancy, the breakdown of the family, and the breakdown of democracy.

That innocent-looking box is literally sucking up people's family time, outdoor time, and community time. How did such an innocent-looking box come to such pre-eminence in people's lives that they watch on average of four and a half hours every day in front of it?

It is time to take a second look at that box that took the world by storm in the 1950's.

## Television transformed society within three generations

Based on how engrained the television is in our society, one might think that it had been around for centuries. With the ubiquitous presence of TV's in houses, schools, banks, cars, airplanes, buses, cell phones, and more, people wonder how they would ever survive without their daily dose of *Oprah* and *Monday Night Football*.

Yet, television was not officially introduced to the world until in 1939 at the World's Fair. At that time, many people did not think that families would have enough time or patience to sit down for long periods in front of a flickering screen. "The average American family hasn't time for it," said one commentator.<sup>11</sup>

World War II stalled the development of television temporarily. After the war though, TV sales took off faster than you could say "Hi Ho Silver, Away!" By 1950, about 9% of American homes had a television set. By 1953, half of all households had a TV. By 1962, 90% of all households had a set.<sup>12</sup> Today 98% of

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.fcc.gov/omd/history/tv/documents/76years\\_tv.pdf](http://www.fcc.gov/omd/history/tv/documents/76years_tv.pdf)

<sup>12</sup>[http://www.tvhistory.tv/Annual\\_TV\\_Households\\_50-78.JPG](http://www.tvhistory.tv/Annual_TV_Households_50-78.JPG)

American households have at least one TV set and 76% of families have more than one TV set.<sup>13</sup>

Initially, only two networks distributed television programming for approximately 3½ hours per day.<sup>14</sup> Today there are hundreds of channels providing entertainment twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. As a result, people are glued to their screens for an average of 4½ hours per day.<sup>15</sup> This is more than half of people's leisure time. Many people cannot even imagine life without TV. This phenomenal transformation occurred within only three generations.

## **TV watching continues to grow**

The TV phenomenon is spreading everywhere like a new, bizarre form of cancer. No longer confined to the living room, TV's are popping up everywhere in public and private life: in bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, basements, closets, cell phones, cars, RV's, schools, banks, stores, doctor's offices, churches, day care centers, buses, planes, and even gas stations. It is now possible to turn your computer into yet another television set for the home or office and download programs from the internet. It is insane! Unfortunately, everyone seems to busy watching TV to notice.

The amount of time people are spending watching TV seems to be climbing higher too. This is partly propelled by new technology, giving people more options and opportunities to watch. For example, a recent study showed that people who had digital video recorders (DVR's), like TiVo, watched 12% more TV than those who did not have DVR's.<sup>16</sup> The growth of "on demand" programming is also likely to increase viewing time for the average family.

## **"No Couch Potato Left Behind"**

The case of the switchover to digital TV (HDTV) illustrates how far we have come as a society in our attitudes towards the television set. In 2005, there was an extensive and fierce debate in the US about cutting Food Stamp benefits. At the time this debate was proceeding, Congress was also considering a law that would help the poor transition to HDTV. Without this assistance, millions of

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.tvhistory.tv/TV-VCR-Remote-Cable\\_Ownership.JPG](http://www.tvhistory.tv/TV-VCR-Remote-Cable_Ownership.JPG)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.tvhistory.tv/1941\\_June\\_30\\_WNBT\\_Program.jpg](http://www.tvhistory.tv/1941_June_30_WNBT_Program.jpg)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.nielsenmedia.com/newsreleases/2005/AvgHour\\_Minutes92905.pdf](http://www.nielsenmedia.com/newsreleases/2005/AvgHour_Minutes92905.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/entertainment/13184519.htm>



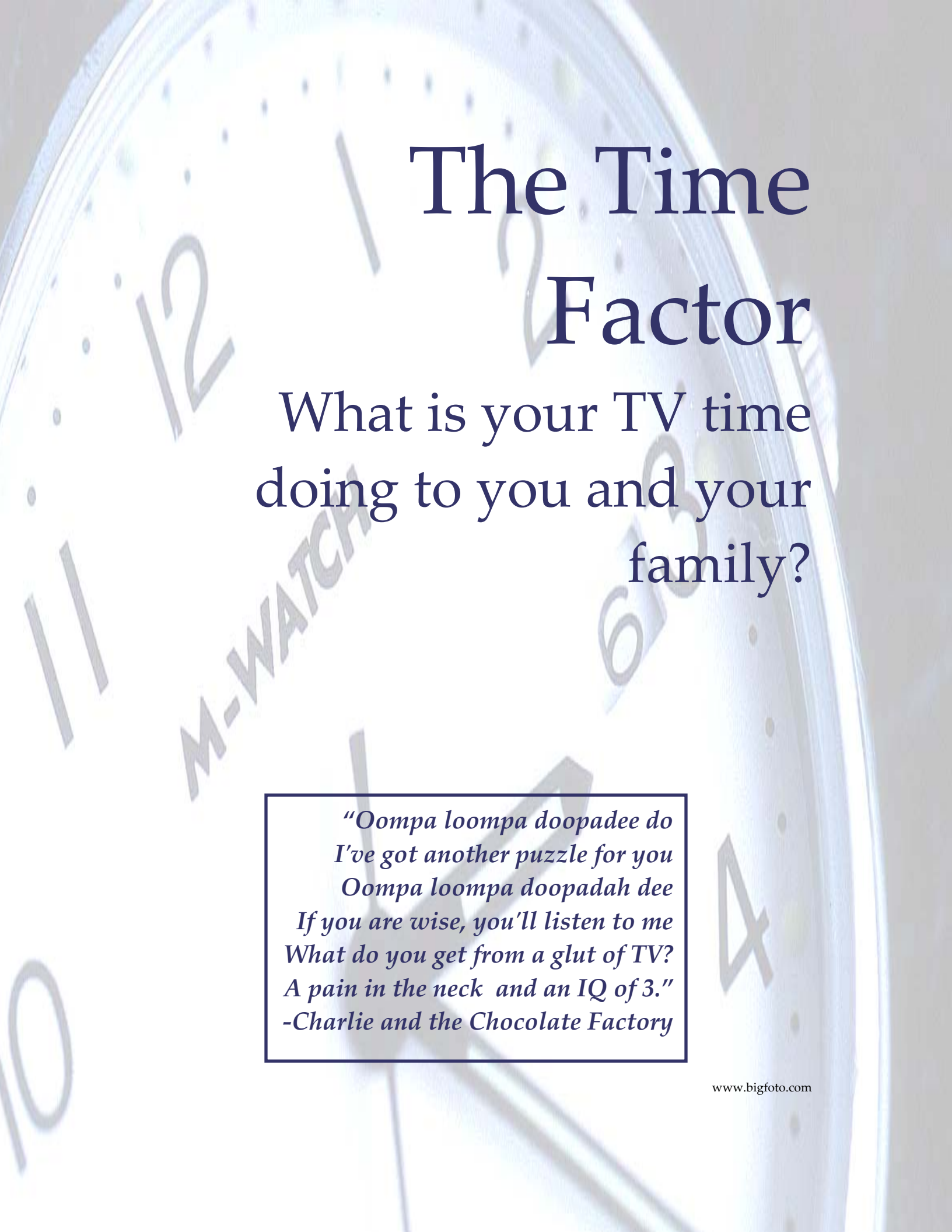
poor families might not be able to watch TV after the networks switched from analog to digital TV.

Unlike Food Stamps, this TV entitlement received bi-partisan support. George Will aptly named it the “No Couch Potato Left Behind” entitlement.<sup>17</sup> With little fanfare or debate, President Bush signed the “No Couch Potato Left Behind” Law in February 2006. The final version earmarked \$1.5 billion to pay for converter boxes for older television sets.<sup>18</sup> Society is a long way from “the average American family hasn’t time for it”. Today TV is an entitlement.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/58513.htm>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.hdtvmagazine.com/articles/2006/02/president\\_bush\\_signs\\_historic\\_dtv\\_bill\\_cea\\_says\\_hdtv\\_is\\_on\\_a\\_roll.php](http://www.hdtvmagazine.com/articles/2006/02/president_bush_signs_historic_dtv_bill_cea_says_hdtv_is_on_a_roll.php)



# The Time Factor

What is your TV time  
doing to you and your  
family?

*"Oompa loompa doopadee do  
I've got another puzzle for you  
Oompa loompa doopadah dee  
If you are wise, you'll listen to me  
What do you get from a glut of TV?  
A pain in the neck and an IQ of 3."  
-Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

## Average American watches 4½ hours of TV every day

The time spent watching TV impacts many aspects of life. According to the latest figures from Nielsen Media Research, Inc., the average American now spends **4 hours and 35 minutes every day** watching TV.<sup>19</sup> The rest of the world is not far behind. The average household also has the TV playing for **8 hours and 14 minutes per day**.<sup>20</sup>

These figures should be setting off alarms in society. Why aren't they?

This time seems to be coming from other healthier activities like quality family time, outdoor play and exercise time, and reading time. This seriously affects the quality of many people's lives.

The 4½-hour-per-day figure represents more than half of people's free time. This last century witnessed the invention of phenomenal timesaving and life-improving devices. However, television sets across the globe began sucking up all the benefits from these devices. Today, instead of having more free time and robust health than ever before, there is an obesity epidemic and many people feel pressed for time. Instead of having better families and stronger communities, the foundations of our society are crumbling. Yet, few think to look at that innocent-looking box.

That 4½-hour figure adds up to a frightening amount of time. Watching TV four and a half hours every day adds up to **31½ hours per week**. In other words, the average American spends the equivalent of a part-time job watching television.

Few people would list "being a couch potato" among their life's ambitions. Nonetheless, people from every walk of life are inadvertently sacrificing their goals and dreams of to the almighty tube.

Every year, the average person clocks in almost 10 solid weeks of television. Assuming a life expectancy of 70 years, 4½ hours every day adds up to **13 years** of watching television over a lifetime. This is a serious amount of time. We won't even try to add up the totals for the entire population of the United States ...yet. This amount of time is difficult to imagine.

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<sup>19</sup><http://www.nielsenmedia.com>

<sup>20</sup><http://www.nielsenmedia.com>

## What could you do with this time instead?

Imagine what you could achieve with 13 years of your life. What experiences could you have? What could you accomplish with that much time? What could you learn? How could you grow?

What legacy could you leave for your children and grandchildren? At the end of your life, would you want them to remember you for all the TV you watched? Or would you instead want your friends and family to remember the fun times you all shared, the friendships you built, and your lifetime achievements?

Furthermore, if you had only a year left to live, would you waste a single second watching TV? No matter how many years you have left, at the end wouldn't you rather look back over a rich, full life? Consider how turning off your TV might help you to create that life.

## Families suffer when TV gets 31½ hours per week and children get 38 minutes of parents' time

The biggest casualty of people's TV habit seems to be quality family time. In contrast with 31½ hours in front of a TV, the average American parent spends only 38 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their children.<sup>21</sup> Yet, pundits on both the left and right wonder why the American family is in crisis. As a parent, how can you have a meaningful relationship with your children, if you are so busy watching TV that you do not have time to talk with them? It is simply not possible. You cannot build a family foundation on reruns of *Leave it to Beaver*.

Your children may not say it, but kids often want more time with their family. According to the Horatio Alger Association's report, *The State of Our Nation's Youth*: "If they could have one wish granted, students would choose to have more time to spend with their families (46%)." Children chose family time over having more money to buy material things (27%), living in a bigger house (14%), and having more time to spend on spiritual pursuits (7%)."<sup>22</sup>

Logically, parents also cannot build a meaningful relationship while they are watching TV. There has been no prominent study relating the amount of time

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.tvturnoff.org/images/facts&figs/factsheets/FactsFigs.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.horatioalger.org/pdfs/state05.pdf>

couples spend in front of the TV to divorce. However, an Italian study recently revealed that having a television in the bedroom cuts adults' sex life in half. The team of researchers in Rome found that Italian couples who live without a TV in the bedroom had sexual relations eight times a month. Couples with a TV had sexual relations half as often.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, turning off the TV will not automatically create an idyllic family, and it likely will not overcome severe problems such as abuse, alcoholism, or extreme poverty. However, it will give your family the time to manage life's basic problems and to build a lifetime of happy memories.

### **“Heavy” TV watchers are twice as likely to be obese**

This large amount of time spent motionlessly staring at a screen is also hazardous to people's health and girth. Numerous studies show a strong relationship between TV watching and obesity. The most striking were several studies published in *The American Journal of Public Health*<sup>24</sup>. These studies found that people who watched three or more hours of television per day were almost **twice as likely to be obese** than people who watched less than one hour per day. Men, women, and children all had similar results. The waistlines of men, women, and children are all victims of their TV-watching habit.

Reviewing 40 recent studies involving TV and childhood obesity, a Kaiser Permanente study found a clear link between the amount of time children watch TV and their weight. The review also found that interventions that reduce children's media time resulted in weight loss.<sup>25</sup>

This issue, however, does not need the benefit of numerous studies. It is simply common sense to expect that people who watch a lot of TV are more likely to be heavier. Almost any other activity burns more calories than watching TV. Only

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<sup>23</sup>[http://www.boston.com/yourlife/relationships/articles/2006/02/09/turn\\_off\\_the\\_tv\\_\\_\\_turn\\_on\\_your\\_partner/](http://www.boston.com/yourlife/relationships/articles/2006/02/09/turn_off_the_tv___turn_on_your_partner/)

<sup>24</sup> Thomas N. Robinson, MD, MPH “Reducing Children's Television Viewing to Prevent Obesity: A Randomized Controlled Trial” *JAMA*, Oct 1999. 282: 1561 - 1567.  
LA Tucker and M Bagwell. “Television viewing and obesity in adult females.” *Am J Public Health*, Jul 1991; 81: 908 - 911.  
LA Tucker and GM Friedman. “Television viewing and obesity in adult males.” *Am J Public Health*, Vol 79, Issue 4 516-518.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia022404nr.cfm>

sleep burns fewer calories. Talking on the phone, reading a book, doing the dishes—all burn more calories than watching television. With the national average of four and a half hours per day, the extra calories burned just by turning off the TV can add up quickly. Sending both adults and kids outdoors to play for 4½ hours every day instead of watching TV would probably cure the nation’s obesity epidemic in just a few years.

In addition, those nefarious junk food commercials are expert saboteurs of healthy diets. The mouthwatering hamburgers, candy bars, or luscious desserts practically beg viewers to consume them. There are approximately 32 commercials on every hour-long TV show. A significant portion of these commercials is for fast food and junk food. What healthy diet could stand the onslaught of those sinister, mouthwatering, commercials?

Finally, many people snack in front of the TV, usually with junk food such as potato chips, soda pop, or candy. In the zombie state that people usually fall into while watching TV, it is very easy to consume large amounts of food, simultaneously absorbing both the images and the food.

*“Where did that bag of potato chips go?”* bewildered viewers wonder.

The combination of burning fewer calories, viewing junk food commercials, and consuming food while watching makes for a serious couch potato problem.

If obesity is a problem for you and/or any member of your family, you may wish to consider controlling TV watching as a first step towards a slimmer, healthier, more active lifestyle.

## **Excessive TV watching affects reading, schoolwork, and long-term success in life**

In a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study, the researchers found that some kids read more than others do. Those whose parents set and enforce rules about TV read an average of 16 minutes more per day than those without rules. Children who do not have a TV in their bedroom also read an average of 16 minutes more than children with no bedroom TV. Finally, in homes where the family

does not leave the TV on most of the time, children read an average of 18 minutes longer every day.<sup>26</sup>

Several recent studies in 2005 also demonstrated that watching excessive amounts of TV negatively influences academic achievement. First, one study looked at nearly 1,000 adults in New Zealand. It found that 26-year-olds, who had watched excessive amounts of TV during childhood, had lower education levels than those who watched less TV. They were more likely to leave school without qualifications and less likely to earn a university degree. Therefore, excessive TV viewing in childhood may have long-term consequences for educational achievement.<sup>27</sup>

A second study found that having a television set in the child's bedroom was significantly and negatively associated with students' test scores, while home computer use was positively associated with the scores. Absence of a bedroom television combined with access to a home computer was consistently associated with the highest standardized test scores.<sup>28</sup>

A third study found that there were slight adverse effects on cognitive development of children. Each hour of average daily television viewing before age 3 years was associated with deleterious effects on scores at ages 6 – 7.<sup>29</sup>

## Reducing TV watching helps

The obvious conclusion to these studies is that people need to reduce the time they spend in front of the TV. Why aren't people watching less then? The aforementioned effects are most commonly cited by doctors and pundits concerned about the influence of television. Many people are aware of these effects. Nonetheless, TV watching continues to increase.

Part of the problem is that many people are often unaware of the real amount of time that they are spending in front of the TV set. Studies, which ask viewers to

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia030905nr.cfm>

<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Hancox, MD; Barry J. Milne, MSc; Richie Poulton, PhD. Association of Television Viewing During Childhood With Poor Educational Achievement. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005;159:614-618

<sup>28</sup> Dina L. G. Borzekowski, EdD; Thomas N. Robinson, MD, MPH. The Remote, the Mouse, and the No. 2 Pencil. The Household Media Environment and Academic Achievement Among Third Grade Students. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005;159:607-613.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick J. Zimmerman, PhD; Dimitri A. Christakis, MD, MPH. Children's Television Viewing and Cognitive Outcomes: A Longitudinal Analysis of National Data. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005; 159: 619-625.



estimate how much TV they watch, are consistently lower than the studies, which require the viewer to measure their TV time. Nielsen Media Research, Inc. has made a science out of measuring the time people watch TV, because advertisers and networks depend on their marketing research to determine advertising rates. Their 4½-hour figure is likely accurate

However, how much you and your family actually watch is far more important than what everyone else watches “on average”. Guess how much you watch every day here first:

*I think I watch \_\_\_\_\_ hours of TV per day.*

Then take a week and record every show that you watch. Once you have an accurate idea of how much TV you and your family watch, you can make better decisions about how to control it.



# Content Matters

What happens when kids see 50,000 commercials, 14,000 sex references & 18,000 murders?

**“TV is trash. I was raised without it, I didn't miss anything. TV is poison.”  
-Madonna**

## “TV is Trash” Commercials, sex, and violence pollute the airwaves

The problems with TV involve more than just the amount of time that people are watching. The garbage on TV that affects not only adults, but young children. Commercials encourage them to nag their parents for cheap toys and junk food. The violence, even the seemingly innocuous cartoon violence, can turn kids into bullies. The incessant sexual references can encourage teens to experiment sexually before they are ready. While the networks continue to produce more programs filled with sex and violence, parents continue to allow their children to have access to TV's in their bedrooms where it can be difficult to monitor.

## People watch an average of 50,000 TV commercials per year

Commercials are another significant problem with TV-watching, and your pocketbook is the primary victim. The average person who logs in 4½ hours of TV per day also tunes in to more than 50,000 commercials per year. Even if adults can resist the manipulative marketing tactics, children do not have the ability to discern fact from fiction from cheap advertising.

Worse, during each of those cute commercials, your children are facing an army of ruthless marketers who want to teach and encourage your child to nag for their products until you purchase them. The marketing term is the “Nag Factor”, or how many sales companies can make from kids who beg, plead, and yes...NAG their parents for goods and services.

Once upon a time, society viewed children as precious beings that parents and society needed to protect until they learned to navigate in the larger world. Today TV marketers literally look upon your kids as exploitable sources of income. Take heed of the words of one of the gurus of this trend, James McNeal, “With all their purchases ahead of them, and with their ability to pull their parents along, children are the **brightest star in the consumer constellation.**”<sup>30</sup> [emphasis added]

McNeal sees three separate markets in children. There is the primary market—children’s allowances, part-time jobs, and other direct income. There is the influence (read “nagging”) market in which children “pull their parents along”

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<sup>30</sup> [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m4021/is\\_n4\\_v20/ai\\_20497111](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4021/is_n4_v20/ai_20497111)

to purchase goods and services. Finally, there is the future market, which envisions customers who purchase a given brand for life.

Alternatively, consider the words of Cheryl Idell, a pioneer in teaching kids how to nag. "Nagging falls into two categories," she explains. "There is persistent nagging, the fall-on-the-floor kind, and there is importance nagging, where a kid can talk about it."<sup>31</sup>

In other words, Ms. Idell teaches and encourages your children to argue with you, which can also stress family relationships. Furthermore, to saturate your children's environment, marketers, like the aforementioned McNeal, combine TV exposure with such marketing tactics as associating smells with specific brands, which shamelessly exploits infants' sensitivity to smell, and the lovely tactic called the "Drool Factor":

*Ever notice how a 5- or 6-month-old sometimes watches to see where his drool lands? Discovering that was an "aha!" moment for former Texas A&M marketing professor James McNeal. He reasoned that if the drool dripped to a diaper or a bib imprinted with an image of a character that's linked to a brand, and if the baby sees the logo repeatedly.<sup>32</sup>*

If the baby sees that logo repeatedly on the TV and on him or herself, marketers hope he or she will be loyal to that brand for life. That is the mentality of the marketers behind TV commercials. If you let your children watch TV commercials, these marketers get a chance to reach your children thirty-two times every hour.

In 2001, the Nag Factor influenced an estimated \$300 billion in sales.<sup>33</sup> That amounts to over \$4,000 per pestering child per year. Who knows how much more money was spent on the subsequent sales of headache relievers!

Neither the government nor media control groups have been effective in controlling these marketers. However, protecting your kids is a parent's job anyway. To protect your kids from these marketers and their tricks, reduce your children's TV viewing time and skip through the commercials. Either teach your children how to fast forward through these manipulative commercials, or do it for them.

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<sup>31</sup>[http://www.mothing.com/articles/growing\\_child/consumerism/whine.html](http://www.mothing.com/articles/growing_child/consumerism/whine.html)

<sup>32</sup> [http://medialit.med.sc.edu/marketers\\_babies\\_profits.htm](http://medialit.med.sc.edu/marketers_babies_profits.htm)

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.biz.colostate.edu/faculty/joec/BG655/Projects\\_Fa01/Marketing%20to%20Kids.htm](http://www.biz.colostate.edu/faculty/joec/BG655/Projects_Fa01/Marketing%20to%20Kids.htm)

## Sex content on TV doubled in seven years

As if the commercials are not devastating enough, the content of most programming is actually dangerous for many children. It is often not healthy for adults either. Sex and violence seem to be the natural programming for the media of TV. Scenes of gore and lust splash on the screen in vivid color. The abstract concepts of love, joy, and friendship simply do not fit as well into a box. It is not surprising then that the trend in television content has been towards more sex and violence.

In fact, sexual content has *doubled* in the last seven years. "Scenes featuring kissing, fondling, and talk about sex have nearly doubled on television since 1998," according to a Kaiser Family Foundation study.<sup>34</sup> Among the top 20 watched shows by teens, which include *Desperate Housewives*, *The O.C.*, and *One Tree Hill*, 70 percent include discussions and depictions of sexual behavior. Worse, just 14 percent of shows with sexual content acknowledged risks or included safe-sex messages.

According to several RAND studies, these messages have an effect. First, teens who watch television that has more sexual content are more likely to have sexual intercourse for the first time in the following year. Surprisingly, according to one study, programs in which characters talk about sex affect teens just as strongly as programs that graphically depict sexual activity.<sup>35</sup>

## Violence on TV makes kids more aggressive and fearful

The sexual content on TV is not nearly as shocking as the violence. The most commonly cited statistic is that by the age of 18 the average American will have witnessed 16,000 murders and 200,000 violent acts on TV.<sup>36</sup> However, with the increase in viewing time and the trend towards more violence on TV, researchers will soon need to revise that statistic upwards.

Contrary to public perception, cartoons are some of the most violent programs on TV. Cartoon violence is especially pernicious, because it trivializes the violence, often making it humorous. For example, after one of his numerous attempts to kill the Roadrunner, Wile E. Coyote plummets to the ground. He

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia110905nr.cfm>

<sup>35</sup> [http://rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9068/index1.html](http://rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9068/index1.html)

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.usmayors.org/USCM/us\\_mayor\\_newspaper/documents/10\\_12\\_98/documents/Historic\\_\\_quot\\_\\_National\\_Summit\\_on\\_School\\_Violence\\_and\\_Kids\\_from\\_2\\_00\\_to\\_8\\_00\\_pm\\_quot\\_\\_101998.html](http://www.usmayors.org/USCM/us_mayor_newspaper/documents/10_12_98/documents/Historic__quot__National_Summit_on_School_Violence_and_Kids_from_2_00_to_8_00_pm_quot__101998.html)

gets up, and his body starts wiggling up and down like an accordion. It looks funny, but it teaches children that violence is not serious. It also teaches them that violence does not have serious, genuine consequences.

Granted most children will not grow up to be murderers and criminals. Nonetheless, according to the American Psychological Association, they may:

- Become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others
- Be more fearful of the world around them
- Behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others
- Be less likely to see anything wrong with violence<sup>37</sup>

In one study done at Pennsylvania State University, researchers observed approximately 100 preschool children both before and after watching television. Some watched violent cartoons, and others watched completely non-violent programs.

The children who watched the violent cartoons, were “more likely to hit out at their playmates, argue, disobey class rules, leave tasks unfinished, and were less willing to wait for things” than those children who watched nonviolent programs, according to Aletha Huston, Ph.D.<sup>38</sup>

Another study found that four-year-olds who watched excessive amounts of television were more likely to become bullies. Each hour of television viewed per day increased the likelihood that children engaged in bullying behavior. These findings held even when the authors statistically controlled for previous bullying behavior.<sup>39</sup>

Still another recent study found an added result from watching violent media. Watching media violence affected a critical brain function called “executive functioning”. The study examined the violence from both television and video games. It found that violence negatively affected what scientists call “executive functioning”. Executive functioning involves such things as the ability to stay focused on a thought or task, the ability to plan, ignore distractions and to utilize

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.apa.org/pi/pii/vio&tv.html>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.apa.org/pi/pii/vio&tv.html>

<sup>39</sup> Frederick J. Zimmerman, PhD; Gwen M. Glew, MD; Dimitri A. Christakis, MD, MPH; Wayne Katon, MD “Early Cognitive Stimulation, Emotional Support, and Television Watching as Predictors of Subsequent Bullying Among Grade-School Children.” *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005;159:384-388.

past experiences to control behavior. According to Dr. William G. Kronenberger, "The adolescents in the study with the most media violence exposure had the weakest executive functioning."<sup>40</sup>

## Case Study: Cartoon Violence

As a child, you may have laughed at some of the frequently violent cartoons. Take another look at the violence and consider how it might actually make you or your children immune to the horror. Watch [Snow Business](#)<sup>41</sup> a classic cartoon with Daffy Duck. Try to count how many violent acts you see. There are quite a few. In less than five minutes, there are over twenty violent acts. Some are intentional. Some are accidental. Daffy tricks his rival into falling off a cliff. Snowplows run over Daffy on multiple occasions. Daffy beats up Elmer Fudd and steals his cast. Several dozen skiers run over Daffy. Daffy's foot catches fire. Finally, Daffy falls out of a window. Admittedly, the show's portrayals of the violence are funny. Yet, if you watch the show with a critical eye, you can see how such fare may immunize children to the horror of violence and suffering.

## TV violence causes long-term aggression

Watching violence on TV may also have serious, long-term consequences. According to a long-term study by Dr. Leonard D. Eron, watching television violence at age 8 was the strongest predictor of aggression 22 years later--stronger even than exhibiting violent behavior as children. The groundbreaking study statistically controlled for initial aggressiveness, intelligence, and social class.<sup>42</sup>

A later study of students from the first through the fourth grade reached similar frightening conclusions. Men, who were heavy viewers of violent TV shows as children, were twice as likely as males, who were light viewers of violent TV, to push, grab, or shove their spouses and three times as likely to be convicted of criminal behavior by the time they were in their early 20s. Women, who were heavy viewers of violent programs as children, were more than twice as likely to have thrown something at their partner and more than four times as likely to have punched, beaten, or choked another adult.<sup>43</sup>

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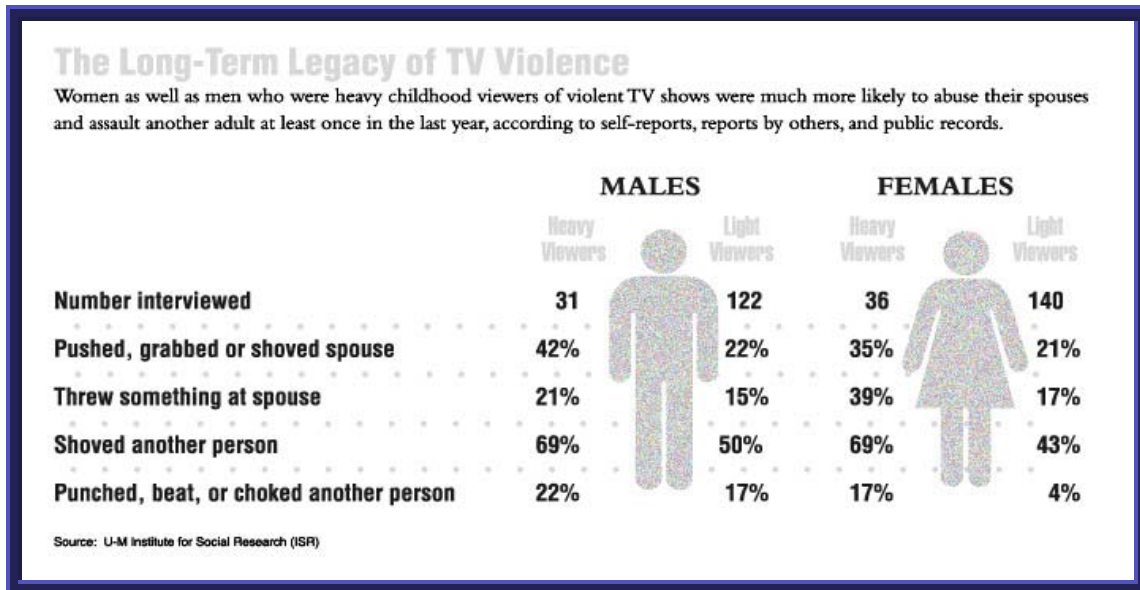
<sup>40</sup> <http://i-newswire.com/pr22656.html>

<sup>41</sup> [http://looneytunes.warnerbros.com/web/toons/toons\\_detail.jsp?id=toons\\_mallard\\_snowbusiness](http://looneytunes.warnerbros.com/web/toons/toons_detail.jsp?id=toons_mallard_snowbusiness)

<sup>42</sup> <http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/0518ero.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/?id=HUESMANN.UMI>





The study statistically controlled for childhood aggressiveness, social class, intelligence, and several other factors. The researcher in charge of the study, social psychologist Dr. Huesmann said: "We also found that greater identification with same-sex aggressive characters and a stronger belief that violent shows 'tell it like it is' predicted violent adult behavior."<sup>44</sup>

Even if you are an otherwise ideal parent, by allowing your children to watch violent television, you may be unwittingly setting them up for a violent future. If you allow them to watch TV, keep an eye on the content they are viewing.

At this point, you may be thinking that the solution is to keep control of the content and the amount of time that you and your family watch TV. That will certainly help alleviate some of the aforementioned problems. If you choose to adopt that strategy, there are tools that can help you.

[Family Safe Media](#) offers a variety of TV-control tools help you control both the time and the content that that you allow your family to see. Like [The TV-FREE System](#), these tools put you in control of the time and content your family is exposed to—not the government, or some watchdog or public interest group.

Unfortunately, there are worse problems with television than the trashy content. Even non-violent, wholesome programming has nasty effects on viewer's brains. It is also addictive and these addictive effects can make it difficult to control your

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/?id=HUESMANN.UMI>

television viewing. Understanding these effects may cause you to have the sudden desire to toss your TV out the window.



# Your Brain ...on TV

What is behind that vacant  
zombie-eyed stare?

*The horror of television is that the information goes in, but we don't react to it. It goes right into our memory pool and perhaps we react to it later but we don't know [consciously] what we're reacting to.*

**-Dr. Eric Peper**

## TV really does rot your brain

Urban legend claims that TV “rots your brain.” It probably arises from the spaced-out zombie look that most people get when they watch TV and the fact that some people seem unable to turn it off.

Unfortunately, very few studies available show what really happens to the brain when people tune in to the set. The contrast between the volumes of studies on the TV’s effects on violence or obesity is stunning. However, the few studies that are out there show some very clear negative effects on the brain.

TV programs employ cinematic tricks, which grab your attention. The TV screen then lulls the brain into a passive, hypnotic, alpha brainwave state. Then if, you are susceptible, you may become addicted to the reassuring flicker of the screen.

The Oompa Loompas may have been right: “a pain in the neck and an IQ of 3.”

## TV “grabs” your attention

Have you ever noticed that it is difficult to avoid looking at a TV, if one is playing nearby? This is neither an accident nor a weakness on your part. Virtually all TV programs use cinematic tricks to “grab” and “hold” the viewer’s attention. Human brains are hard-wired to turn their attention towards things that suddenly change in the environment. This is an evolutionary benefit, because it helps humans evaluate potential threats. The body relaxes while the brain gathers information. The scientific term is the “orienting response”.

Television programs exploit the orienting response. Sudden changes in volume, cuts, zooms, scene changes, or sudden movements on the TV cause you to look at the TV. Repeated changes have the effect of “holding” your attention. Commercials, action movies, and music videos are notorious for containing large numbers of these sudden changes that “grab” and “hold” your attention. Even many quality children’s programs, like *Sesame Street*, contain large numbers of these attention grabbers to keep little viewers watching.

A fun exercise to see the orienting response in action is to turn on a TV in a room full of people. Stand back and watch almost everyone turn his or her attention towards the screen, one by one. Watch entire conversations dissolve. Watch the fun grind to a halt. In *The TV-Free Workbook*, you will also examine the power of the orienting response.

## TV's hypnotic effect

Once the orientation response glues your attention to the screen, some very strange, but subtle, things start to happen to your brain. The effects are somewhat pleasant and relaxing, at least while the TV is on.

Look closely into the eyes of anyone who is watching TV. Most of the time they have a zombie-like, spaced-out, empty look to them. Unfortunately, there have been very few studies done to examine this phenomenon. The few published studies present a rather frightening picture of what the human brain looks like when it is hooked to a TV screen.

Watching TV may feel relaxing. TV has a remarkable ability to shut out the rest of our crazy world. All the world's problems vanish as your TV program wraps you in a cozy Never Land; or so it seems.

In fact, your brain goes into an alpha brainwave state. This state feels relaxing. You become less alert and more passive. The state is comparable to hypnosis. Worse, your lowered alertness and feelings of passivity do not end after you turn the TV off. The culprit for this effect is most likely the cathode ray tubes in your TV monitors, which can produce a flicker that your conscious mind does not detect.

According to a Scientific American study, "survey participants commonly reflect that television has somehow absorbed or sucked out their energy, leaving them depleted. They report that they have more difficulty concentrating after viewing than before."<sup>45</sup>

Other studies have linked the passivity to the left side of the brain shutting down. The left-brain is primarily responsible for logical analysis and thought. In the Mulholland experiment, 10 children watched their favorite television program, while the researchers monitored their brainwave patterns. The researchers expected that the children would show a preponderance of beta waves. This would indicate that they were involved and responding to their favorite programs. Instead, they stayed in alpha. "They just sat back. They stayed almost the whole time in alpha. That meant that while they were

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=0005339B-A694-1CC5-B4A8809EC588EEDF>

watching they were not reacting, not orienting, not focusing, just spaced out," said Dr. Eric Peper.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, in the early 1980's, researchers in Australia found that the left-brain "sort of went to sleep" once TV was switched on, but the right brain was busy "storing information in its memory bank".<sup>47</sup> Scandalously, no one was able to follow up on these experiments. Researchers could not get funding. Aside from a few early experiments in the US and a few more in the 1970's and early 1980's in Australia, the neurophysiology of watching television has been relatively unexplored, even though the experiments discovered clear and frightening effects.

Furthermore, the Scientific American researchers found that after they turned off the TV people's moods were about the same or worse than before they turned the television on.<sup>48</sup> What this means is that television may provide a quick fix for emotional difficulties, but it lasts only as long as you are watching TV. If you are trying to avoid painful feelings, those feelings will return immediately when you turn off the TV.

What these studies show is that the right side of the brain may be dutifully absorbing all the images from your television screen, but the left side is lulled into a stupor by the television's flicker. This makes analysis of the images difficult. It also makes it difficult to remember exactly what you have been watching. Furthermore, the research suggests that the left side of the brain may remain in a stupor even after you turn the TV off.

This has profound implications for watching news and other forms of educational TV. At best, TV learning is comparable to sleep teaching. That may be useful for commercials, at least for the companies that produce them. However, for subjects that require analysis and careful thought, the TV is virtually useless. It is more effective to read books and newspapers to learn about world events, than to watch it on a screen.

Very little is known about how the new high definition TVs (HDTV's) will affect brain function. Given that the technology involves staring at a more detailed

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<sup>46</sup> Mander, Jerry. Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television. Morrow Quill Paperbacks: New York. p. 210

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.raphaelhouse.school.nz/index.php?pid=59>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=0005339B-A694-1CC5-B4A8809EC588EEDF>

picture, it is possible that the effects will be the same as regular TVs, but stronger. Viewers may actually be guinea pigs in a massive experiment.

You and your family will test several of these effects in *The TV-Free Workbook*. You will also take a cold, hard look at the effects of TV both through the lens of a camera and through the eyes of your friends and family.

## Television is addictive

When you turn on the TV, you become relaxed almost instantaneously. The quickness of the relaxation can condition you to associate TV with relaxation. As long as you are watching TV, you will remain relaxed.

Scientific American researchers, Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, also found that this feeling of relaxation ends as soon as the TV is turned off, reinforcing the association that TV = relaxation equation. They compare it to a drug in terms of its relaxation effect.

With drugs, the faster a drug leaves the body, the more addictive it is. "A tranquilizer that leaves the body rapidly is much more likely to cause dependence than one that leaves the body slowly, precisely because you, the user, are more aware that the drug's effects are wearing off."<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, if you sense that you will feel less relaxed if you turn off the TV, you may be more likely to leave it on. This can grow into a dependency over time, as you increasingly turn to the television screen in order to relax.

Therefore, when you click the power button on your TV, you may soon feel relaxed, but you will also feel the side effects of passivity, suggestibility, and difficulty concentrating. When you turn off the TV, you will stop feeling pleasantly relaxed, and you will still experience the negative side effects. This is a formula for an addiction.

Another sign that TV is addictive is that people often feel withdrawal symptoms when they try to go for long periods without watching TV. Many viewers may feel anxious for a time as they try to adjust to living without TV's relaxing effects. Charles Winick, a researcher who analyzed numerous studies of people trying to give up TV, found that the first three to four days were the hardest, even for

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<sup>49</sup><http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=0005339B-A694-1CC5-B4A8809EC588EEDF>

families who did not watch much TV. "In over half of all the households, during these first few days of loss, the regular routines were disrupted, family members had difficulties in dealing with the newly available time, anxiety and aggressions were expressed. . . . People living alone tended to be bored and irritated."<sup>50</sup>

An addiction can make it difficult to control TV viewing. Naturally, some people are more susceptible to the addictive effects of TV than others are. Take some time to assess your level of addiction.

This is why simple exhortations to "turn it off" are not enough for many people. Many people will need to take serious steps to get their addiction under control.

## **Television causes ADHD symptoms in young children**

Television can be especially damaging to developing minds. An alarming study from 2004 found that watching TV at ages one and three caused attention-related problems at age 7. The attention problems included whether the child had difficulty concentrating, was easily confused, was impulsive, had trouble with obsessions, or was restless.<sup>51</sup> These are symptoms of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

The researchers speculate that the developing brain may be more vulnerable to the over-stimulation of TV. Both the researchers and the sponsors of the study, The American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend that parents exercise caution in letting their children under the age of 2 years watch **any** television.<sup>52</sup>

This particular study only looked at very young children. However, given the other effects on the brain discussed earlier, especially the effects on concentration, it is likely that the television set is causing attention-related problems in older children and adults.

## **What about your brain?**

Because of the stunning lack of studies on TV's effects on brain function, it is important to monitor your own reactions to the TV. Several of the worksheets in *The\_TV-FREE Workbook*<sup>53</sup> focus on testing what the television set is doing to your

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=0005339B-A694-1CC5-B4A8809EC588EEDF>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/tvapril.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/tvapril.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> <http://tvfree.trashyourtv.com>

brain. Like any other addiction, it can be difficult to step back and notice these effects without effort.

Can you avoid looking at a TV when one is playing? How do you react emotionally to the television set? How do you feel after watching TV for long periods? Can you leave the TV off for three days? How difficult is it to turn off the TV in the middle of a show? Do you look like a zombie when you are watching?

Take a moment to consider how you react to the TV and whether or not you have an addiction.





# TV Corrodes Democracy

What happens when 300  
million Americans are  
hooked into their TV sets  
for 4½ hours every day?

*Our growing social-capital deficit threatens  
educational performance, safe neighborhoods,  
equitable tax collection, democratic  
responsiveness, everyday honesty, and even our  
health and happiness.*

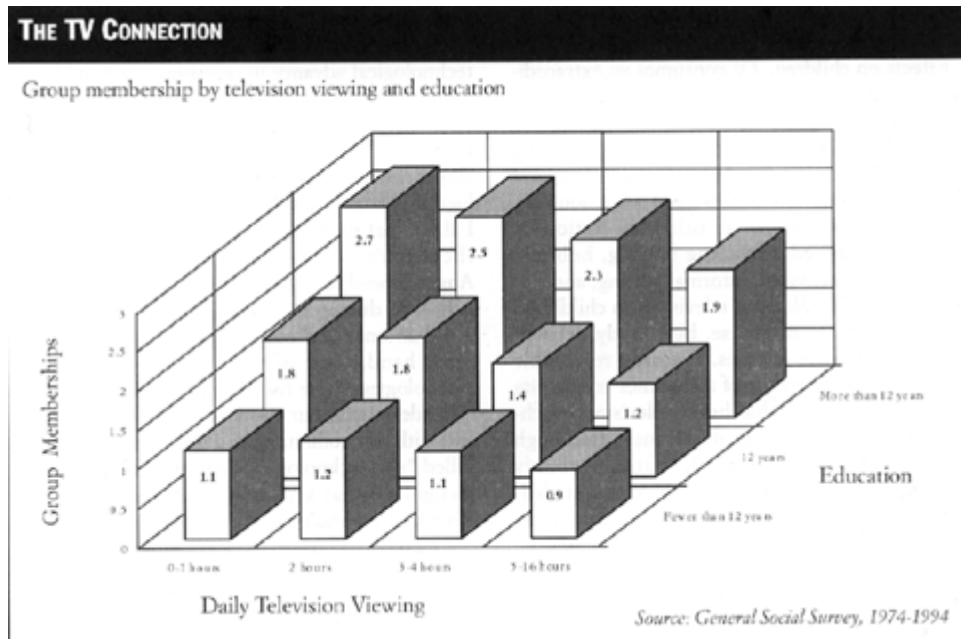
**-Robert Putnam**



## When a society is addicted to TV, democracy suffers

TV takes up so much time that citizens are becoming less active socially and politically. They also trust the government and each other less and less. Researcher Dr. Robert Putnam found that the more TV people watched, the less they were involved in public activities.

“TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership,” the study found. Newspaper reading, on the other hand, had a strong positive relationship. Newspaper readers were involved in larger numbers of political organizations. The study controlled for education, income, age, race, place of residence, work status, and gender.



The study also found that “heavy TV watching is one important reason why less educated people are less engaged in the life of their communities.”<sup>54</sup> A community of TV-watchers is a politically docile and quiescent community.

Furthermore, television, because of the expense involved in production and distribution, inherently favors large corporations. Usually, the only other social entity able to afford the expense of TV is government.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.prospect.org/print/V7/24/putnam-r.html>

TV is inherently a one-to-many technology. The networks transmit one message over the airwaves or through the cable network to thousands, millions, or, in the case of events like the *Super Bowl* and the *Olympics*, billions of minds. This is vastly different from the internet where many people can interact and discuss as a group.

Moreover, because of the tendency of the television set to shut down people's ability to think critically, as discussed in the "TV's hypnotic effect" section, the message that is blasted out over the airwaves enters viewers minds unfiltered. Whether you agree with the message or not, that is simply too much power.

## **Five companies control the media**

Looking at the vast amount of programming available, you might think that there is a wide variety of choice. There are literally hundreds of TV stations with options to choose from sports, news, cartoons, history, painting, and more. On the surface, the amount of options appears staggering. Surprisingly, however, only five major corporations control the majority of the media. Those companies get access to nearly every American mind for 4½ hours every day. The consequences to democracy are frightening.

These five huge corporations—Disney, Time Warner, Bertelsmann of Germany, Murdoch's News Corporation, and Viacom (formerly CBS)—own not only most of the television stations, but now own most of the newspapers, magazines, books, and radio stations in the United States as well.<sup>55</sup>

## **Politicians chase money for commercials**

TV affects both the voters and the public servants they elect. In a recent speech, former Vice President Albert Gore noted that politicians spend so much time and money to purchase election ads that they do not have time to do the jobs voters elected them to do.<sup>56</sup>

Politicians spent \$515 million on television spots in the 2005 elections, the highest in a year with no Congressional or Presidential seats contested. This was up from the \$300 million spent in the 2003 elections, according to TNS Media

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.benbagdikian.com/>

<sup>56</sup> [http://www.newshounds.us/2006/01/16/al\\_gores\\_speech\\_january\\_16\\_2006.php](http://www.newshounds.us/2006/01/16/al_gores_speech_january_16_2006.php)

Intelligence/CMAG. In New York alone, the mayoral candidates spent more than \$44 million saturating the airwaves.<sup>57</sup>

## Watch out for “Fake News”

Further weakening democratic processes, government agencies, corporations, industry groups and other large organizations contaminate the airwaves with fake news. These organizations produce pre-packaged news segments called VNR's, or Video News Releases. These segments look like real news. In fact, VNR's are little more than propaganda pieces for their producers. Stations have routinely used these fake news segments since at least the 1980s, usually without disclosing their source.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the government and other social actors creating interesting audio or video pieces to communicate with the public. The problem is that these propaganda pieces do not properly identify the source. Their creators make them resemble independent newscasts with actors pretending to be reporters.

There have been a few efforts to control this phenomenon. The Government Accountability Office ruled in February 2005 that government-sponsored TV "news" reports are covert propaganda, unless their source is apparent to viewers.<sup>58</sup>

The Senate introduced the Truth in Broadcasting Act (S. 967) in 2005 into committee. This act would require all pre-packaged, government-produced audio and video news releases to include a clear disclaimer that the government was the original source. This act would not apply to VNR's produced by corporations, industry groups, or charitable foundations. As of this writing, the full Senate has yet to vote on the bill and no one has introduced a companion bill in the House of Representatives.<sup>59</sup>

## VNR Case Study: Games for Health

To see how these VNR's can be misleading, download this video produced by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The foundation released this “Games for

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.tns-mi.com/news/11102005.htm>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/decisions/appro/304272.htm>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s109-967>

Health” VNR in September 2005 about a new type of video game that was supposedly healthy for children.

[Windows Media Player version !\[\]\(21199eb166cc97331a0c54c649195dcc\_img.jpg\)](#)<sup>60</sup>

[RealPlayer version !\[\]\(2bdfe261b986065ee0ac76460d6528c9\_img.jpg\)](#)<sup>61</sup>

According to their website, “With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Serious Games Initiative, the Games for Health program is exploring, fostering and supporting the creation of projects that use cutting-edge games and game technologies to address important health and health care issues.”<sup>62</sup>

Many recent studies have implicated watching TV and playing video games in the growing obesity epidemic among children, as discussed previously. The Johnson Foundation video suggests that there is hope for this problem from some new types of video games, which are supposedly healthy to watch.

If you had seen this video on your local evening news show, you might think it was unbiased story from a news agency. There are a few clues that technically identify the story as a VNR, if you are quick enough to catch them. The two guest speakers have “RWJF TV Health Series” in front of their names. Did you know that “RWJF” stands for “Robert Woods Johnson Foundation”? Other than those two vague reference, there is no identification of the source of the story.

Knowing that a specific foundation produced the news release and not a real news station changes the nature of the information. It begins to look biased.

Although the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is nominally an independent charity, it is closely associated with Johnson & Johnson, Inc., a multi-national corporation. Furthermore, following the links on their site we find that the U.S. Army is the “founding sponsor” of the Serious Games Initiative’s 2005 Serious Games Summit.<sup>63</sup>

Another link on the Games for Health page leads to a site called “Social Impact Games”<sup>64</sup> which is sponsored by a site called “Games 2 Train.”<sup>65</sup> This site has a

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<sup>60</sup> [http://www.myhomefront.tv/media/D0198/video/D0198\\_Web\\_Pkg\\_9.22\\_256k.wmv](http://www.myhomefront.tv/media/D0198/video/D0198_Web_Pkg_9.22_256k.wmv)

<sup>61</sup> [http://www.myhomefront.tv/media/D0198/video/D0198\\_Web\\_Pkg\\_9.22\\_256k.rm.ram](http://www.myhomefront.tv/media/D0198/video/D0198_Web_Pkg_9.22_256k.rm.ram)

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.rwjf.org/newsroom/activitydetail.jsp?id=10154 &type=2>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.seriousgamessummit.com/home.html>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.socialimpactgames.com/>

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.games2train.com/>

contract with the US General Services Administration<sup>66</sup> and a partnership with the US Department of Defense Game Developers' Community.<sup>67</sup>

With that information, this video news release is beginning to look like anything but an independent, unbiased news story. How many of the stories on the evening news are similar propaganda pieces?

## **TV's full impact on democracy**

To understand the full impact of TV on democracy, try to imagine an election and politics without TV. Imagine an election with no television attack ads. Imagine politicians who no longer beg for money to cover the escalating costs of TV ads. Imagine voters who read about the debates, instead of watching the TV debate spectacle. Imagine engaged citizens, who debate the issues with their neighbors and participate actively in the community, instead of watching TV for 4½ hours every day (1.33 billion hours per day for the entire US population). Imagine a press that is not beholden to merely five multinational corporations. Imagine news where the sources of the story are transparent. Nothing would be the same.

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<sup>66</sup> <http://www.games2train.com/site/html/GSA.html>

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.dodgamecommunity.com/>

## Final note about the negative effects of TV

The problems with TV thus span a wide variety of issues. The time many people spend watching TV displaces other healthy activities, like exercise and family time. The commercials not only target adults, they target children in unhealthy ways. Scenes of sex and violence permeate the content of many programs. The technology has negative effects on the brain and can lead to addiction. Finally, the structure of the industry, combined with the time spent watching and the nature of the technology, undermines communities and democracy. Any one of those issues is reason to throw your TV out the window.

Unfortunately, this is just a rough sketch of the problems with TV. For a more thorough understanding of these effects, consider reading a few of these books:

[The Plug-In Drug](#) by Marie Winn

[Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#) by Jerry Mander

[Glued to the Tube: The Threat of Television Addiction to Today's Family](#) by Cheryl Pawlowski

[Get a Life!: The Little Red Book of the White Dot](#) by David Burke

[Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business](#) by Neil Postman

[We Know What You Want : How They Change Your Mind](#) by Douglas Rushkoff

[Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community](#) by Robert Putnam

However, regardless of the studies or what anyone else thinks, what is truly important is how TV impacts you and your family. The workbook in the TV-Free System takes many of the issues with TV and measures their effects on your life. People are different and respond differently to TV. Some people can turn off a TV set in the middle of their favorite program without any trouble. Other people need to be dragged kicking and screaming from a TV set.

Once you understand *your* relationship to TV, you can get your TV watching under control and begin a TV-free life—a life that is free of the negative effects of TV.



A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white cardigan over a black top and blue jeans, stands in a field of tall grass and green plants. She has her arms outstretched to the sides, smiling. The background is a dense field of green foliage.

# Imagine a TV- Free Life

What could you do with  
4½ hours every day?

**"GO OUTSIDE AND PLAY!"**  
**-Pre-TV solution for feisty kids**

## Imagine...

Once you get control of your TV viewing, not only do you reduce the negative effects; you can begin a completely different life. Take a few moments to imagine the life you could create apart from your TV.

***Breakfast without TV:*** When everyone is in a hurry to get to school or work, morning can become very hectic. TV only adds to the distraction. If there is no TV blaring, children are more likely to cooperate with getting ready. There may even be time for an old-fashioned family breakfast. At least your family will have more time for pleasant good-byes as they all start their day.

***After-School without TV:*** Instead of after-school cartoons, which are usually filled with violence and annoying ads, send kids outside to play. Kids need to play. They are so much happier when they have a chance to run around and burn off energy. Parents need to play too. Join your kids in a game of soccer or basketball. Go for a walk around the neighborhood. Go for a family bike ride. The possibilities are endless. Enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. You can even drag some friends and neighbors away from their TVs, Game Boys, and computers and all play together. With all that exercise, you and your family should build up quite an appetite.

***Dinner without TV:*** After so much fun and exercise, your family will be ready for a hearty, healthy dinner together. Remember, they have not been watching TV commercials for Crunchy Tasty Pops, Fantastic Soda, and other junk food. Dinnertime is also relatively quiet and pleasant without the din of the TV set. Your family can discuss any problems or concerns that may have come up during the day. Catch up on the family news you need to hear instead of the TV news the networks want you to hear.

***Chores without TV:*** Now imagine your family finishing dinner and cleaning up together. Ok, I realize chores are not the most popular or enjoyable family activity. You may not even wish to mention chores when you are selling this "Family Time" plan to the rest of your family. However, just imagine how much easier it will be to get everyone to pitch in when the TV is off.

***Prime Time without TV:*** After a healthy dinner and chores, it is a "prime time" for your family to connect with some fun activities. Depending on your family, this time could be either relaxing or exciting. You could play board games, do puzzles, read, or cuddle for a laid-back evening. You could dance, have pillow



fighters, or even have tickle fests for fun and excitement. You could even go for an evening walk and look at all the strange glows coming from other houses where the families are staring at their TV's like zombies.

**Late night without TV:** Once the kids are in bed, you and your partner will have a perfect chance to connect. You can paint your own picture about what that time might be like. However, after going this far without watching TV, I would hope you would not turn it on at this point!

Then, naturally, after such an exciting, fun-filled day you will be ready AND have time for a full night's sleep.

**Your Family without TV:** Do you think your family might be happier and healthier with such a routine? Naturally, each family is different. The routine your family actually creates will probably be a little different from the one described above. My family's routine does not quite match up with the above, especially when it comes to chores, but we have lots of family time. Many times I have a hard time keeping the kids indoors, because they love to play outdoors so much.

Sketch a vision for you and your family below:

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After a year or more of living with little or no TV, you may wonder how you ever had the time to watch. Perhaps, however, you or some members of your family still doubt whether you can get in control of your television watching.

## Common Objections to Controlling TV

***“I don’t watch that much TV.”*** Most people underestimate the time they actually spend watching TV. The 4½-hour-per-day figure is from Nielsen Media Research, Inc. Keep track of all the shows you watch for a week and then you will know how much you actually watch.

***“TV doesn’t hurt anyone.”*** I admit those TV sets look innocent, but the studies in this book suggest that your TV set is actually hazardous to your health and well-being, especially if you watch for long periods. If you complete *The TV-Free Workbook*, you will be able to see these negative effects in your own life clearly.

***“You are a luddite, who just hates progress and technology.”*** No. I like computers and the internet. Some technology is beneficial. Some technology is harmful. Some technology is beneficial, but has some harmful side effects. Television just happens to be very harmful.

***“You and others like you are finger-wagging elitists, who like to think they are better than everyone else.”*** No. I cannot speak for others, but I spent 35 years of my life watching TV like the majority of people today. My journey to a TV-free life began with the experience of being homeless. The plain and simple truth I have discovered is that life is better without TV.

***“I couldn’t possibly give up watching [insert show].”*** Yes, you can. Humans existed for hundreds of thousands of years without any television. Deep down you know this. That is most likely your addiction talking.

**Note:** This book was originally the first book in *The TV-Free System*. If you have not already done so, please consider purchasing the full *TV-FREE System* to help turn your vision of a TV-free life into reality. The complete system includes *The Awful Truth About Television*, *The TV-FREE Workbook*, and the *Family Fun Finder*. The system comes with a complete money-back guarantee. You have nothing to lose and potentially 4½ hours every day to gain.

Learn more at <http://tvfree.trashyourtv.com>

## Send a copy of this FREE E-book to your friends and family

Pass this free e-book to your friends and family. With your help, more people can reclaim their lives from the destructive influence of the TV. People need to know the full and awful truth about how those innocent-looking boxes in the living rooms are damaging their lives.

There are three ways to pass this along.

1. Make a complete and unaltered copy and send it directly to your friends and family.
2. Direct people to the [Trash Your TV](#) website, where they will receive a free copy when they register.
3. Become an affiliate for the TV-Free System at [Paydotcom.com](#) and create a version with your affiliate links. Then pass it on to people on your list.

The only conditions are that you do not violate any SPAM or other applicable laws. Furthermore, you may not claim ownership of, sell or modify the contents of this FREE e-book in any way. If you give it away, give it away for FREE and without making any changes to it.

*“You’re beginning to believe the illusions we’re spinning here!*

*You’re beginning to think that the tube is reality and that your own lives are unreal.*

*You do whatever the tube tells you --*

*You dress like the tube. You eat like the tube. You raise your children like the tube. You even think like the tube.*

*This is mass madness, you maniacs!*

*In God’s name, you people are the real thing.*

*We are the illusion!*

*So turn off your television sets. Turn them off now! Turn them off right now! Turn them off and leave them off. Turn them off right in the middle of this sentence I’m speaking to you now.*

*Turn them off!!!”*

-Howard Beale in the movie *Network*

## About the Author

Katherine Westphal is the founder of the website, *Trash Your TV!* She and her family have been happily living without a TV for over three years. She created the website to join the scant few voices on the internet calling attention to the problems with TV, but also to spread the good news that living without TV has immeasurable rewards.

She has written several books about television, including the TV-Free Workbook, the central component of The TV-Free System. Her most recent book, *A-Z To TV-Free*, helps young children aged 2-8 find fun alternatives to watching TV.

The website and books are based on extensive research, plus the practical experience of weaning her family off the TV. The website continues to grow and attract viewers from all over the world. Ms. Westphal currently lives in Boulder, Colorado, with her three children Victoria, Frank, and George.

[www.TrashYourTV.com](http://www.TrashYourTV.com)

