

Impact of COVID-19 on Children - A Pediatric Ophthalmologists Perspective

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Dear Editor,

The COVID-19 has emerged as a rapidly spreading pandemic. In India there are approximately 321 million children under lockdown.¹ Though this time has come with an opportunity for self growth, discipline and family cohesion, it is not free of disadvantages.²

There are lots of concerns for the young population. Digital devices are winning the quest as children are additionally glued to screens for education, apart from entertainment. There is a strong evidence that prolonged use of digital devices makes children susceptible to problems like Computer Vision Syndrome. Excessive screen time is associated with tiredness, eye strain, sedentary lifestyle, anxiety, disobedience and reduced interest.³ Furthermore, there is a highly anticipated myopia pandemic amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. There is also evidence that attention deficits and communication issues are more common with children addicted to gadgets.

In the present scenario, leisure activities like playing outdoors and meeting friends are restricted. Contact with peers is limited through online video calls or chat applications. Pietrobelli et al⁴ reported decrease in sports activities by 2.30 hours/week, an increase in sleep time by 0.65 hours/day and screen time by 4.85 hours/day among children during COVID-19 lockdown. These can have a strong negative impact on the mental health.

Thus, it is important to engage children in physical activities, and restrict screen usage for educational activities only. Not to give digital devices any space on the dining tables. Junk foods, carbonated drinks and sweets should be avoided. Any sign of anxiety or depression must be given cognizance.⁵ Here are the few preventive measures to follow:

- A - Adjust the monitor screen position and brightness
- B - Blink frequently
- C - Change habits and follow the 20-20-20 rule i.e. while using digital devices after every 20 minutes, take a 20 seconds break and relax your eyes by looking at something 20 feet away
- D - Drink adequate fluids
- E - Exercise (Outdoor/Terrace games)
- F - Fruits and fresh vegetables
- G - Glasses should be worn regularly

Be optimistic and let children know that they are the strong warriors of this tough time.

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