Switch off, tune out and enjoy summer without screens

- Parenting column by Sasha Hart, family care manager at Community Family Care, Stauton

WITH the summer holiday approaching many parents may be thinking about reducing their children’s screen time. UK health advice suggests children should have screen free days and two-hour limits on time in front of screens. It sounds great but the reality of implementing this can be a battle many parents struggle with.

Here’s how to set some boundaries and swap screen time for face time.

- Turn off your tech for the same time you expect your children to.
- Establish rules
  Have family rules regarding screen use and implement times when you have family time and everyone turns off their tech.
- Create a family agreement regarding the use of screens/tech and get everyone involved in coming up with the rules for breaks so everyone is on board as a family.
- Use apps to help programme breaks on devices and use consequences such as turning off the internet or power to help enforce breaks.
- You may also have a tech box where devices get put during a screen free day. You may also have school rules and weekend rules regarding screens.

- Equal devices
  The average family has nearly two dozen screens under one roof so they must be treated the same.
  Don’t just swap a tablet for TV time. Try to eliminate background TV so children get used to screen free time.
  Removal of a device could be a consequence for not following the family agreement.
- Be active
  Plan what your child views, watch programmes or play games with them and comment on what you’re watching (more interactive).
  Screen time can be isolating so have a balance of interaction during time on tech. It can be used as a teaching tool.
  Tablets and phones can limit the amount of eye contact shared between children and parents so remember to put down your tech when responding to your child.
- Provide alternatives
  Creating a weekly schedule based on the idea of one hour of technology use equalling one hour on other activities.
  There are lots of alternatives to screen time – relive your childhood fun.
- Community Family Care, based at Stauton helps families, children and young people in need of additional support communityfamilycare.co.uk

MAXIMISE YOUR NUTRITION

DR PHIL BOYLE, right, a consultant in reproductive medicine at Dublin’s Neo Fertility clinic, says it’s important to optimise nutrition in preparation for pregnancy, but warns: “Don’t be taken in by trendy diets. While it’s always a good idea to cut down on processed foods, don’t cut out certain food groups or skip meals.

Instead, opt for a balanced diet rich in nutrients, vitamins and minerals to help give you the best chances of pregnancy.”

He says taking a supplement with a comprehensive formulation can also be a good idea. Women should also take something that includes B vitamins and magnesium as well as folic acid, he adds, while men can help boost the quality of their sperm with selenium and arginine.

DON’T FORGET YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If you’ve been trying for a baby longer than expected, it may take a toll on your relationship. Try to actively invest in your relationship by taking the time to do the things you both enjoy, and make sure you talk to each other about how you feel,” suggests Dr Boyle.

MEN MATTER TOO

ALTHOUGH men tend to think they’ll be able to conceive forever, this isn’t the case, stresses Dr Boyle, who says men need to understand the importance of having good quality sperm for a healthy pregnancy. “After 40, the quality of men’s sperm declines. Older men trying for a baby may experience a low sperm count, poor motility and damage to the DNA,” he explains.

CHECK MEDICATION

LAURA DOWLING, a pharmacy manager aka Fabulous Pharmacist, advises couples to pop into their local pharmacy and have a chat about any medication they’re taking.

“They’ll tell you if they’re safe to continue taking while trying to conceive and in early pregnancy, and whether you need to visit your GP to discuss alternatives.”

PLAN AHEAD

STOP taking birth control medicine a couple of months before trying for a baby, advises Laura, pictured. “There’s no risk in trying straight away, it just helps to establish your pregnancy once you conceive,” she says.

“Many also find it helpful to track their periods for a few months, to make it easier to pinpoint when they’re ovulating.”

BE CAREFUL WITH LUBRICANTS

MANY couples use lubricants – but check the labels or ask your pharmacist and clinical nutritionist to share 12 top tips for couples trying to conceive...

ROUND one in seven UK couples – amounting to some 3.5 million people – have difficulty conceiving. And while some might end up needing tests and medical support – according to the NHS, for couples who’ve been trying with no luck for more than three years, the likelihood of getting pregnant naturally within the next 12 months is around 25% or less – there are lots of steps men and women can take to help optimise their chances.

- Here, a fertility doctor, pharmacist and clinical nutritionist share 12 tips for couples trying to conceive...

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2. Try to eliminate background TV so children get used to screen free time.
3. Don’t just swap a tablet for TV time.
4. Use apps to help programme breaks on devices and use consequences such as turning off the internet or power to help enforce breaks.
5. You may also have a tech box where devices get put during a screen free day.
6. You may also have school rules and weekend rules regarding screens.
7. Create a family agreement regarding the use of screens/tech and get everyone involved in coming up with the rules for breaks so everyone is on board as a family.
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FAMILY MATTERS