

Balancing your child's PLAY diet.

With all the advice on parenting and what children should or shouldn't be doing it is sometimes hard to know what to do for the best. Parents beat themselves up over not giving their children enough fruit/veg/quality time/gadgets/pocket money/discipline and at the same time worry that they're giving them too much junk food/gadgets/pocket money/discipline etc. It's almost impossible to get the balance right.

We spoke to Dr. Amanda Gummer, one of the country's leading authorities on child development and founder of Fundamentally Children, and asked her advice on how to give children a balanced play diet.

The website www.fundamentallychildren.com, home of the Good Toy Guide and Good App Guide as well as a wealth of practical parenting advice, champions the role of a balanced play diet in healthy childhoods.

Dr Gummer explains, 'There is a lot of pressure on parents regarding the amount of screen time children are allowed. It is important that there is a balance between screen time and active, social play, so if children watch half an hour of tv or play on the computer, try and ensure they go and play in the garden for half an hour, or go to the park.'

Parents can struggle with knowing how to get mesmerised children away from the screen but Amanda has a few tips that really work.

- Take TV's or screen out of the bedroom. Bedrooms should be associated with peaceful, relaxing activities and sleep not a gaming environment. (If you only take one piece of advice here, take this one!)
- Read stories together and act them out - young children will enjoy this attention and interaction and will love getting involved with you in an imaginative world
- Ensure the children have plenty of access to non-screen entertainment such as books, music, board games, jigsaws and crafts
- Encourage outdoor play- Frisbee, skipping, football, treasure hunts, den building, scavenger hunts, mud pies, and choose toys that can be used inside to promote active play even when the children can't go outside
- Get your child to help out in the kitchen, plan menus together, allow them to help with food preparation and go shopping together for the ingredients
- Get your child to help out with household chores, get them to fold clothes, pair socks, dust their rooms and turn it into a game - this teaches valuable skills and children will thrive on the positive reinforcement they get from having been helpful.
- Get out and about. Plan trips to museums, parks, zoos, family bike rides or walks and engage children with the wider world that's at their feet.

- Set a good example- practice what you preach. If you sit in front of a screen 24 hours then so will your children. Let them see you get up and turn the screen off after an agreed time, and make sure you are not always checking your phone or mobile device when you are with them.
- Mix and match playmates – children play differently with different people so involve other family members, older and younger children as well as peers.
- Do your research before buying toys, tech or apps for children to make sure they're going to get maximum benefit from it.

A balanced play diet is a key theme of Fundamentally Children and the expert advice along with independent toy and app reviews helps parents choose toys and games that will help their children engage in a range of beneficial activities and ensure that they get their play 5 a day.

For more advice on play, toys, apps and child development visit www.fundamentallychildren.com and engage with Dr Gummer and her team via social media:



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