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Letter to Editor

Scrolling Towards Stress: The Negative Influence of Mobile Reels on Hypertensive Health

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Dear Editor,

I wish to draw attention to the rising influence of short video content on social media and its potential negative impacts on adult health, particularly its contribution to conditions such as hypertension.

Hypertension is a chronic disease that affects the heart and several other vital organs. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 1.28 billion individuals globally are affected by this condition [1].

The rising popularity of short-form videos on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok is increasingly being associated with a range of health-related concerns. In Scotland, for instance, 57.0% of adults aged 16 to 99 reported engaging in screen-based activities-including television viewing-for more than three hours per day. This prolonged sedentary behavior is associated with an increased risk of developing hypertension [2], highlighting the cardiovascular implications of excessive digital media exposure, especially from mobile reels and other short-form video content. Prolonged engagement with short-form digital content frequently contributes to reduced physical movement, musculoskeletal discomfort due to improper posture, and increased eye fatigue. These factors contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, which is a well-established risk factor for several chronic illnesses. Among these conditions, hypertension is particularly concerning. Not only can excessive screen time contribute to its development, but hypertension itself also serves as a gateway to other serious non-communicable diseases [3]. Excessive screen time fosters sedentary behavior, which is known to adversely affect cardiovascular health and contribute to elevated blood pressure. Prolonged screen exposure is often accompanied by increased levels of mental stress and physiological arousal. This may activate the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, triggering the release of cortisol a stress hormone associated with hypertension. Although observational research has associated digital media use with stress-related outcomes, experimental data remain limited. A recent randomized controlled trial involving 164 adults assessed the impact of reducing recreational screen use to under three hours per week. While the intervention improved participants' self-reported mood and mental well-being, no consistent changes were observed in salivary biomarkers of stress, including cortisol and cortisone. These findings highlight a psychological benefit of screen-time reduction, while also suggesting that the physiological stress response may necessitate longer intervention durations or may be influenced by individual variability. Nonetheless, the overall behavioral pattern of excessive screen use continues to align with risk factors associated with hypertension and other non-communicable diseases [4].

To reduce hypertension risks linked to digital overuse, especially from mobile reels, age-appropriate screen habits are essential. Screen exposure for infants below 18 months should be restricted to interactive video calls under adult supervision, while toddlers aged 18 to 24 months should view only brief, high-quality educational content, ideally co-viewed with a caregiver. Ages 2-5 should have restricted non-educational screen time-limited to one hour on weekdays and up to three hours on weekends. Older children and adults should be guided toward balanced screen use and more offline activities. Screen-free meals, use of parental controls, and avoiding screens as emotional pacifiers, and discontinuing screen use at least 30 to 60 minutes prior to bedtime can further support cardiovascular and mental well-being [5].

Conclusion

In light of the growing digital footprint of short-form video content, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, there is a critical need to acknowledge and mitigate its public health implications for public health-especially hypertension. As our daily screen time expands, so does the risk of sedentary behavior, psychological stress, and associated cardiovascular consequences. Although digital media offers entertainment and connectivity, its unchecked consumption may silently exacerbate the burden of non-communicable diseases. We urge public health professionals, policymakers, and digital media stakeholders to take proactive measures to raise awareness, promote screen-time literacy and integrating screen-time management into hypertension prevention strategies. Through collaborative dialogue and the adoption of evidence-based guidelines, we can take meaningful steps toward a healthier, more balanced digital environment.

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