

- Child development

Infant screen time and teen anxiety

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A STUDY by a Singapore government agency has found that children exposed to high levels of screen time before age two showed brain development changes linked to slower decision-making and higher anxiety in adolescence, adding to concerns about early digital exposure.



The study was conducted by a team within the country's Agency for Science, Technology and Research and the National University of Singapore, and published in The Lancet's ebiomedicine open access journal.

It tracked 168 children for more than a decade, and conducted brain scans on them at three time points.

Heavier screen exposure among very young children was associated with "accelerated maturation of brain networks" responsible for vision and cognitive control, the study found.

The researchers suggested this may have been the result of "intense sensory stimulation that screens provide". They found that screen time measured at ages three and four, however, did not show the same effects. Those children with "altered brain networks" took longer to make decisions when they were 8.5, and also had higher anxiety symptoms at age 13, the study said. "These findings suggest that screen exposure in infancy may have effects that extend well beyond early childhood, shaping brain development and behaviour years later," the agency known as A*star said in a press release recently.

A separate study by the same team in 2024 suggested that parents could help counteract some of the brain changes in young children caused by passive screen time by reading to them frequently and engaging more with them in person.

The research comes as governments and health authorities around the world grapple with rising screen use among children and adolescents, and have moved to curb their access to digital devices. Singapore's education ministry recently announced that it will curb the use of smartphones and smartwatches in secondary schools starting last month. – Bloomberg