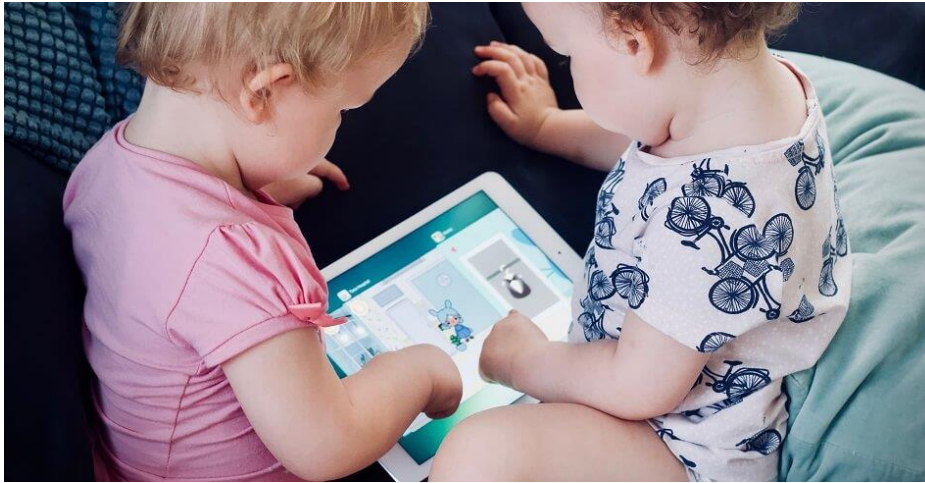


Babies with too much screen time may become anxious teens with slower decision-making: Singapore study



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Summary

- **A Singapore study links high screen time for children below age two to slower decision-making and increased anxiety in their teenage years due to altered brain development.**
- **Parents reading to children at age three can reduce the negative effects of screen time on the brain, emphasising the importance of parental engagement.**
- **MOH recommends screen time guidelines, with experts suggesting responsible use with parental involvement and less stimulating content.**

Using electronic devices to distract and calm noisy, restless babies used to be a great idea, or so parents thought.

Singapore scientists recently found that children exposed to high levels of screen time before the age of two showed changes in brain development linked to slower decision-making and increased anxiety by the time they become teenagers.

However, all is not lost – for children whose parents read to them frequently from age three, the link between infant screen time and altered brain development was significantly weakened.

The new research is led by Assistant Professor Tan Ai Peng, a principal scientist at A*STAR's Institute for Human Development and Potential (IHDP) (Translational Neurosciences). It is Singapore's largest birth cohort study that links infant screen exposure to long-term changes in the brain and adolescent mental health.

“This research gives us a biological explanation for why limiting screen time in the first two years is crucial. It also highlights the importance of parental engagement, showing that parent-child activities, like reading together, can make a real difference,” said Dr Tan, who is also a clinician-scientist at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

The study tracked 168 children from the Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes (GUSTO) cohort for more than 10 years and conducted brain scans at several points to map a possible sequence of reaction from infant screen exposure to teen mental health.

It focused on infancy, a period when brain development is most rapid and especially sensitive to environmental influences; and the amount and type of screen exposure during this period, which are largely determined by parental and caregiver awareness, and parenting practices. – **straitstimes.com, Singapore, December 31, 2025**