

Do Your Kids Practice Safe Tech?

by Alison Main

I grew up in Pelham Manor. Born and raised in this picturesque town, I am a proud alumna of both Prospect Hill and Pelham Memorial High School. I was a child of the '80s and a teen of the '90s. At the age of eight, I was all about Barbie and My Little Ponies. With Cyndi Lauper and Whitney Houston spinning on my record player, I danced around and played dress-up with my best friends. I had a closet of board games to challenge my intellect, and a wall of picture books to capture my imagination. At the age of sixteen, my focus was the SATs and APs. With R.E.M. and No Doubt on the FM radio, I hitched rides in my friends' cars to Sock 'n Buskin plays, chorus rehearsals, stage band gigs, and late night snacks at the erstwhile Thruway Diner. I had a closet of college applications to challenge my sanity, and a wall of textbooks to capture my ambition.

What I did not have, however, was a cell phone. Or a tablet. Or a laptop. Or the Internet. Or Wi-Fi. Or an X-Box. Or Netflix. Or iTunes. Or texting. Or email. Or emotive conversations in emojis. Or my life chronicled on Instagram. Or a distinction between "Facebook Friends" and "friends IRL." Or the magical mystery of Snapchat (which I'll admit... even after a tutorial from a local teen, I still can't figure out).

But, I'm relieved I didn't have any of that. Because all this digital technology and virtual reality has not only challenged how kids relate, socialize, and interact, but computerized overload and wireless overuse at a young age can be damaging to a child's physical health and development. And here's why. There's a fairly heated international debate on the topic of wireless safety, all summoning a spiraling list of personal and public health questions: Are cell phones dangerous? Can wireless signals harm the body? Is there scientific proof of these damaging biological effects? Hasn't the government set safety standards for wireless emissions? Are children more at risk than adults? Should pregnant women and parents be concerned? Should we have Wi-Fi

in schools? How can we protect ourselves, especially our youth?

Take any controversial topic – global warming, vaccines, health insurance, Donald Trump – and you can wage an unending battle of words and stats in a pro-con argument. For the sake of space, I am offering to you a mere glimpse at what you need to know about kids and wireless usage, and a suggested precautionary approach to decrease exposure.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated "Children are not little adults and are disproportionately impacted by all environmental exposures, including cell phone radiation. Current FCC standards do not account for the unique vulnerability and use patterns specific to pregnant women and children." Wireless devices (such as tablets, laptops, game consoles, baby monitors, and Wi-Fi routers) all emit the same type of microwave radiation as cell phones. Accumulating research shows that wireless radiation affects fetal brain development, the immune system and reproductive function. And a child's brain and skull absorb up to ten times more wireless radiation than an adult does, due to their thinner skulls and brain tissues.

Why is this concerning? In 2011, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified Wi-Fi and all radiofrequency radiation as a Group 2B "Possible Human Carcinogen." Moreover, hundreds of scientific studies suggest that low levels of radiofrequency radiation may cause a whole host of other biological effects. I'm not screaming "the sky is falling, get thee to a bunker!" But we can still take simple measures to protect ourselves and our youth every day.

Dr. Devra Lee Davis, PhD., MPH, founder and president of the Environmental Health Trust (<http://ehtrust.org/>) has lectured, authored, and advocated extensively on wireless safety, granting significant attention to kids and their developing brains. The EHT provides copious, thorough information and actionable strategies to those seeking research-based knowledge on

this subject. At minimum, the EHT recommends these guidelines, particularly for kids and teens:

Choose wired over wireless internet connection when you can, and turn off the Wi-Fi when not in use.

Do not sleep with a device under your pillow or in your bed.

Do not carry devices in your pocket, on your belt, or in your bra.

Do not hold the cell phone next to your head.

Decrease your exposure by increasing your distance from emitting sources.

Power off in vehicles: Mobile devices emit more intense radiation during travel, and metal surroundings create radiation hot spots.

Young children are particularly vulnerable and should not use cell phones except in an emergency.

And if you're pregnant, you should heed caution as well. A national public awareness campaign "The BabySafe Project" (www.BabySafeProject.org) offers simple steps for pregnant women to limit their wireless exposure to protect themselves and their unborn children. These ten steps include:

Avoid carrying your cell phone on your body.

Avoid holding any wireless device against your body when in use.

Use your cell phone on speaker setting or with an "air tube" headset.

Avoid using your wireless device in cars, trains or elevators.

Avoid cordless phones, especially where you sleep.

Whenever possible, connect to the internet with wired cables.

When using Wi-Fi, connect only to download, then disconnect and disable Wi-Fi.

Avoid prolonged or direct exposure to nearby Wi-Fi routers.

Unplug your home Wi-Fi router when not in use.

Sleep as far away from wireless utility meters as possible.

Most pregnant women avoid a long list of potential toxins (i.e. tobacco, alcohol, contaminated foods, etc). But wireless radiation may be considered an environmental toxin like any other.

So if you're pregnant, you're probably skipping that tuna sandwich. But if you're keeping your cell phone in your pocket, or balancing your tablet on your abdomen, you could be over-exposing your unborn child to harmful radiation. It's best to follow the BabySafe advice. Just in case.

You don't have to take away your kids' devices. That's like stealing candy from a baby. Wired internet connections do not pose radiation risk, and they are readily and inexpensively available. Getting some physical distance from devices, establishing a no-wireless sleep zone, plus setting family-wide time limits on media usage will collectively help minimize exposure. This is important for everyone, but it is of vital necessity for pregnant women and children.

I can hear the counter-argument to all of this: That every generation looks back with nostalgia... every generation thinks "their way" was the best. And as a consequence, we look to the present-day youth and their new-fangled gadgets with trepidation, misunderstanding, and concern. I'm not denying the benefits of modern, progressive technology. Computers and the internet are extraordinarily valuable educational and discovery tools. No youth should be deprived of opportunities to learn, create, and expand his/her world, and every generation's tech advances are an integral part of this progress. But it is how these devices and connections are being used now that calls for some serious reflection and change.

I grew up under a shockingly visible cloud of the AIDS epidemic. And our parents talked about safe sex. Today's kids are growing up inside an invisible cloud of a wireless epidemic. Parents should start talking about safe tech.

Alison Main is a freelance writer living in Pelham Manor. She focuses on natural living, clinical nutrition, and EMF safety. Echoing her own wellness journey, she is dedicated to helping others heal from environmental illness through holistic methods and philosophies.