



Good for us – Preventing obesity

with exercise, diet and
relaxation

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Good for the whole family

Every child is unique and every family is too. All parents want to give their children a **good start in life**. Healthy growth and age-appropriate development mean that parents need to monitor and support their children very well. **Age-appropriate weight development** is part of this.

Parents play an important part in **preventing children from becoming overweight** – unfortunately, there is no simple one-size-fits-all formula.

However, you can pay attention to a few key elements in **everyday family life**: they include lots of exercise, a balanced diet, enough sleep, little television and a loving atmosphere within the family, which prevents psychological stress. Be a good role model in everything you do, as children learn best from their own family, parents and siblings.

It is certainly not always easy to put this into practice in everyday family life, juggling work, childcare, school, household chores and leisure time. Take the **information and useful** hints in this brochure as an invitation and inspiration.

It doesn't need to be "all or nothing" so you don't have to put everything into practice in your family life from one day to the next. Be patient. Changing habits also takes time. **Even small steps count.** This is about the health and well-being of your whole family.

Certain rules can provide a healthy framework for everyday family life, which will help children to maintain a balanced weight. Read on to find out more.



Lots of exercise every day



Exercise is good. Regular exercise is recommended for children, but also for adolescents, adults, the elderly and chronically ill people.

Exercise is good for physical and mental development. It compensates for stress. Exercise can also have a positive effect on weight.

Every child needs exercise, no matter how old they are. Let your child race around and let off steam as much as they want. There's no upper limit.



Most children would like a bicycle by the time they reach three or four.

HOW MUCH TIME FOR EXERCISE

Babies and infants under the age of 3	as much exercise as possible
3 to 5 years	more than 3 hours a day, including exercise at nursery school and clubs
6 to 18 years	more than 1.5 hours a day, including 1 hour of daily exercise (at least 12,000 steps)

Source: adapted from the "National Recommendations for Promoting Exercise", 2016

- **Exercise in everyday life**, e.g. walking to nursery school or cycling to school
- **Exercise in leisure time**, e.g. letting off steam outside, playing football with friends or skateboarding
- **Sport**, whether at school or in a club
- Motivate your child to exercise. Regularly make short trips by bike or scooter, to a playground for instance. **Think together** about the opportunities that can make it fun for your child. Let your child try out different sports. Perhaps your child will be inspired by a club team sport, dance group or martial arts? A step counter, possibly as an app on their phone, can also help to motivate them. **Go along with your child**, take photos and praise their achievements.
- If you do not have the time or the possibility of accompanying your child to their sports, **ask other parents or friends** if they can take your child with them. Or meet up with other families, whether at the playground, or at football, volleyball, table tennis, badminton or swimming. Taking the first step is easier with others.



Mobile phones, tablets and TV – less is more!



Read more useful
exercise hints and
ideas on page 7.

Children who frequently use electronic media for long periods of time are more likely to struggle with their weight. Sitting for long periods of time can play a part in this. As can the fact that children enjoy nibbling on calorie-rich snacks when watching TV.

DO ELECTRONIC MEDIA MAKE YOU FAT?

Mobile phones, computers and TVs are part of everyday family life. They are used for school, to communicate with friends, parents and siblings, or simply for entertainment.

However, it is crucial that the time your child spends in front of the TV, on the computer and on their mobile phone is clearly limited in their free time. **Exercise is a good alternative** and compensates for sitting around. Let your child try things out to see what they enjoy, whether it's a club sport, kicking a ball around on a football pitch or skateboarding.



It also makes sense to supervise children as they discover the world of media.

USING MEDIA

There are often discussions in families about the issue of media. A few rules that parents and children agree on together can help when using media:

- Do not install a TV or computer in your child's room. That is generally where media time increases.
- Make sure that the TV is not constantly on around the clock.
- Switch off the TV and computer in the morning before nursery school or school, during mealtimes and just before they go to bed.
- There is also a need for certain family times where mobile phones are muted and put away.

HOW MUCH TIME FOR MOBILE PHONES, COMPUTERS OR TV

Babies and infants under the age of 3	no screen media at all
3 to 5 years	max. 30 minutes every day
6 to 11 years	max. 60 minutes every day
12 to 18 years	max. 120 minutes every day

Source: adapted from the "National Recommendations for Promoting Exercise", 2016



The best thirst quencher: **water**

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Water from the tap or mineral water from the supermarket? It's a matter of taste.

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There are zero calories in water. It's a great thirst quencher. A sufficient volume of fluid is important for children to be fit to learn, do sports or play.

DRINKS CAN ALSO MAKE YOU FAT

- **Sweetened drinks** (lemonade, cola, iced tea, sweetened tea and cocoa) contain a lot of sugar and therefore lots of calories. But they scarcely fill you up. Overall, this increases a child's calorie intake, which is bad for their weight. Sugar is also harmful for their teeth. Sweet drinks can generate cravings for sweets. Therefore, drink water instead of sugary drinks as often as possible.
- **Juices** contain fructose and thus lots of calories. Juice is too high in calories to be drunk frequently.

- **Milk and cocoa** are not ideal as thirst quenchers on account of the many calories they contain. However, a cup of low-fat milk is perfect as a drink or mixed with muesli as a snack.



Water also tastes good with a slice of untreated lemon or mint.

MAKING WATER TASTY

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- Best of all, stand water on the table **at mealtimes** – either a bottle of mineral water or a carafe of tap water. This makes it easier for everyone to drink a glass of water with their food or after.
- Add a splash of lemon or orange juice to the water **to taste**.
- **Occasionally** make a squash with two thirds of a glass of water to one third juice.
- Take a nice bottle of water with you to drink **at school** or on the way to school.
- **Being a role model counts:** you should also drink water to quench your thirst!



Eat together regularly



Children do not need snacks during the two to three hours between meals.

Regular meals provide sufficient energy and nutrients. Breakfast, lunch and dinner and a snack in the morning and afternoon – this is how meals can be spread out throughout the day.

EAT MEALS TOGETHER MORE OFTEN

Try to eat together as often as possible. This creates an experience of belonging together for the whole family. It binds and strengthens all members of the family, both physically through the intake of food, but also mentally through togetherness. Eating together is fun; preparing meals together can be fun too.

Involve your child in the preparation of the food. Even little ones can help to set the table. If it is difficult during the week, at least try it at the weekend. That way you can enjoy an extended breakfast on a Saturday and Sunday morning, giving you a sense of togetherness. And another thing: do not let your child eat all alone, particularly when they are small.

Choose products from all 7 food groups. Make the most of the rich range of foods we have available to us. Take into account the quantities illustrated.



VARIED DIET

- **Help yourself:** water to drink, fruit and vegetables, bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, couscous or other grains
- **Eat moderate amounts:** milk, yoghurt and cheese, meat and sausage, fish and eggs
- **Eat minimal amounts:** sweets, pastries, fast food, lemonade rich in fat and sugar



A balanced diet can protect against many diseases.

Acknowledge when you feel full

Every day is different and you do not always have the same levels of hunger. Little ones have a good sense of when they are hungry and feeling full. Give your child enough time and peace and quiet to eat so that they can listen to their stomach.

Eat undisturbed

Switch off the TV when eating. Put your mobile phone in another room or mute it. That way everyone can enjoy the meal without distraction.

Food is not a reward

Do not comfort or reward your child with food and sweets. Otherwise, your child will learn that there will always be something to eat if they are in a bad mood or bored. Instead, give your child a hug and listen to them. That makes children strong and does them good.

Agree on family rules

A few rules can help to make mealtimes relaxing. Rules might include: Not complaining about the meal. Not quarrelling at the table. A sweet dessert is better than snacking in between. These rules are more likely to be adhered to if you agree them together as a family.





Regular relaxation and enough sleep



Sleep is vital for everyone.
Sleep has a positive effect on
the body and mental state.

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**Too little sleep can lead to weight gain. Active
relaxation helps to reduce stress and promotes
recovery sleep.**



Cuddling your child can fulfil the need for closeness and security.

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Infants sleep between 10 and 14 hours.

Children aged between 6 and 12 should sleep 9 to 12 hours.

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HANDY ANTI-STRESS HINTS

- Don't pack too many activities into your child's day.
- Let your child play and let off steam, no matter how old they are! It's all about having fun, not top performance.
- Help your child to rest by factoring in breaks during their day. Give your child a hug. Snuggle up with them. Read aloud to them.
- Talk to your child about their day and listen carefully.
- Let us help you if you are worried. You can contact an advice centre, for instance the Parent Advice Line on 0800 1110500, or the Federal Conference for Educational Advice. Or ask your paediatric doctor or healthcare professional for advice.

HOW MUCH SLEEP DOES YOUR CHILD NEED?

Pay attention to your child. If they are tired, make sure that they have enough rest during the day and enough sleep.

THIS PROMOTES GOOD SLEEP

- Pre-bed rituals (e.g. goodnight story)
- No TV or computer before going to bed
- Enough exercise during the day
- Not too big meals before going to bed
- No drinks containing caffeine (cola, black or green tea, coffee), as they can cause restlessness, sleep disorders or a raised heart rate



Correctly assessing body weight



Your child's weight alone does not tell you whether your child is healthy or sick.

It is difficult to assess your child's weight. Usually your doctor or healthcare professional will regularly check your child's weight. They will evaluate how your child's weight is developing over time.

BMI CALCULATION AND CONSIDERATION OF GROWTH

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to assess weight. How to calculate it:

1. Stand on the scales without clothes and note down your weight
2. Measure your height
3. Multiply your height by your height
4. Divide your weight by the figure you obtained in 3

The BMI alone does not tell you whether your child is the right weight or overweight. Their growth also needs to be taken into account. Therefore, you need to enter the figure into the growth curve for girls and boys (page 21).

This lets you assess your child's weight: Is it in the green zone or too high for their age? Do not dramatise the issue even if your child's weight does not lie within the normal range. Try to handle it delicately and find a solution together.

CALCULATION EXAMPLE

Your nine-year-old child weighs 37 kg and is 1.40 m tall:

$$1.40 \times 1.40 = 1.96$$

$$37 \div 1.96 = 18.9 = \text{BMI}$$

You can find a BMI calculator on the website www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de. This will give you an individual answer to the BMI you have calculated.



A midwife or your medical practice will regularly weigh infants.

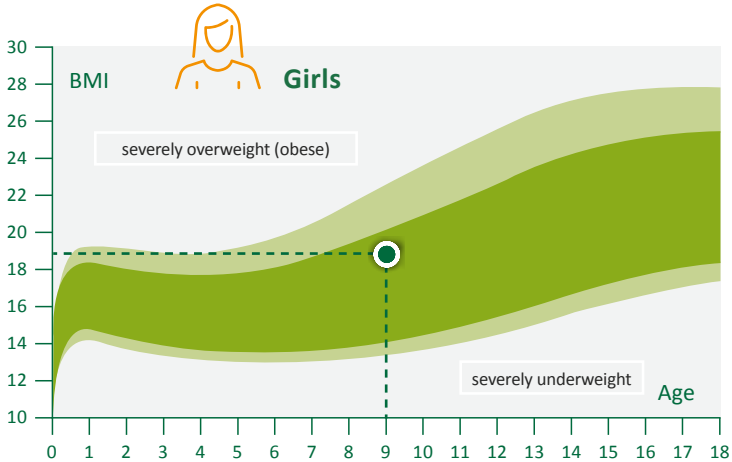
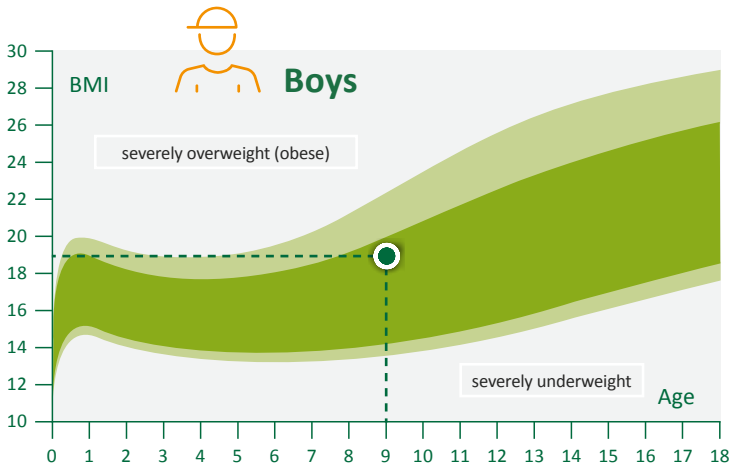
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Calculating the weight of a toddler (under the age of three) is a matter for your healthcare professional. The BMI alone is not meaningful.

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GROWTH CURVES



TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

We recommend talking to your paediatric doctor or healthcare professional if you are unsure whether everything is as it should be or if there is already a need for action. They will be able to best assess your child's weight.

They will take into account the weight shown on the scales, but will also consider your child's personal development. Weight and height are measured in health tests for children and adolescents and entered onto growth curves on the rear of their child examination booklet. This allows the child's weight development to be tracked.



Families can support a healthy weight development with a balanced diet, sufficient exercise, regular relaxation and other lifestyle habits.



The Obesity in Children and Adolescents Society (AGA) deals with obesity in children. Their website includes a wealth of recommended actions, therapy facilities and figures and studies for professionals as well as parents: www.a-g-a.de



My child is overweight – what should I do?



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Your child has many other qualities that make it unique, even if they are overweight. Tell them that and show them that again and again.

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Severe obesity has negative consequences for the body and mind. Together with professionals, you will be able to ensure that your child's quality of life is maintained. Get advice in good time.

1. Talk to your doctor or healthcare professional.

They will be able to best assess your child's weight and tell you whether your child is healthy and developing well. If your child is overweight, the doctor or healthcare professional will be able to tell you whether your child needs therapy. It is often enough for your child to maintain their weight, which will then "fall off" as they grow and develop.

2. Seek help and get information.

There are many organisations that deal with the issue of overweight children. One of them is the Obesity in Children and Adolescents Society (AGA), www.a-g-a.de.

Your health insurance company will also be able to help and support you with information.

3. Check with your doctor or healthcare professional whether a weight loss program might be suitable for your child.

In the event of severe obesity, children and adolescents receive training in balanced diet, exercise and behaviour (e.g. dealing with stress) in special programs. These programs can have a positive impact on your child's health.

4. Start step by step.

A balanced diet, regular but not constant eating, regular exercise and relaxation, switching off the TV and computer more often – this is good for all members of the family. This will allow you to move your child's weight slowly in the right direction.

As a family, think about what you want to change first and what you all need to do to achieve this. Set small goals. Be patient and don't be discouraged by setbacks. As people, we need a lot of time to change our behaviour.

Further information

EXERCISE

The German Sports Youth (dsj) free exercise calendar has lots of ideas for everyday exercise. Its flyer on exercise, diet and relaxation provides useful information on the benefits of exercise in childhood development.

www.dsj.de

The exercise triangle shows which kind of exercise and how much is good for us – in everyday life, in our free time and doing sports.

www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de

The Young Family Network has compiled information and useful ideas for daily exercise with its slogan “Healthy into life”.

www.gesund-ins-leben.de

Do you and your family sit around too much? The Diet and Exercise Platform (peb) has put a “Sitting check for families” and “Sitting check for children” online. Test it out for yourself!

www.pebonline.de

IN FORM – Germany’s initiative for healthy nutrition and more exercise has lots of ideas, materials and suggestions for diet and exercise.

www.in-form.de

USE OF MEDIA

The BZgA BROCHURE “Look and listen well!” provides information, practical examples and a host of useful hints and ideas for parents on the use of media in the family.

www.bzga.de

DIET

The German Society for Nutrition (DGE) website provides detailed information on the nutrition of children and adolescents.

www.dge.de

The Young Family Network has compiled helpful information on learning to eat for toddlers under the slogan “Healthy into life”.

www.gesund-ins-leben.de

The paid-for brochure “The best food for children”, published by the Federal Centre for Nutrition (BZfE) and the German Society for Nutrition (DGE), explains the food pyramid and has plenty of hints and ideas for everyday family life.

www.ble-medienservice.de

The flyer “Nibbling and snacking – moderately but with enjoyment” helps parents to find the right level with sweets.

www.fitkid-aktion.de

RELAXATION AND SLEEP

The BZgA internet portal on child health provides a wealth of information on everyday topics relating to the health and development of children. A large section is dedicated to the issue of sleep.

www.kindergesundheit-info.de

Relaxation courses for children are offered by health insurance companies and other providers, such as sports clubs or family centres. Check with your health insurance company about subsidising the cost of them.

OBESITY

The BZgA shows parents and other people how to prevent becoming overweight with exercise, diet and relaxation

www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de

The Obesity in Children and Adolescents Society (AGA) deals with obesity in children. Their website includes a wealth of recommended actions, therapy facilities, figures and studies for professionals as well as parents.

www.a-g-a.de

The parent information leaflet entitled “My child is too fat” published by the German Society for Paediatric and Adolescent Medicine (DGKJ) offers factual background information and useful ideas for the family.

www.dgkj.de

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By Post: Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), 50819 Cologne,
Germany

By fax: +49 221 8992-257

By e-mail: order@bzga.de

Online: www.bzga.de

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