



# Obesity among children and adolescents



## My child is overweight

## What should I do?

### Contents

- |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|----|---|
| 3 | Foreword  | 8  | Special therapy programs can help with obesity  |
| 4 | Is being overweight bad for a child's health?                   | 12 | My child is overweight – what should I do?      |
| 5 | The mental state suffers before the body                        | 13 | A good environment at nursery school and school |
| 5 | It is not just predisposition                                   | 14 | Information and useful tips                     |
| 6 | Will they grow out of obesity?                                  | 15 | Publication                                     |
| 6 | Is my child actually overweight?<br>And, if so, to what extent? | 15 | Ordering  |

### Foreword

Dear Parents,

Is your child either overweight or seriously overweight (obese)? A doctor or healthcare professional may have recommended nutritional advice, more exercise, a retraining programme or rehabilitation for your child? What should you do now? This brochure provides the answers. It will explain what you can do, what retraining programmes and rehabilitation are, where you can get information, and where and how to apply for this treatment.

But also ask your child if they feel comfortable in their body, and how they might like to look. Encourage them to come up with ideas and suggestions themselves. Talk about how you can put their ideas into practice within the family.

Your child really needs your support in everyday life especially now. Eat well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, turn off screens more often. These are the first steps towards a healthy lifestyle. You are helping your child, at the same time as helping the whole family. You will also find some useful hints and ideas for the whole family at the end of this brochure.

## Is being overweight bad for a child's health?

Being overweight and, above all, obese is damaging for a child's health. This damage is not caused from the first kilogramme of extra weight the child is carrying. Usually it

takes longer, before being a little overweight develops into obesity. Obesity can cause disease even among children and adolescents. Secondary diseases include:



Secondary diseases often regress when excess weight is reduced.



## The mental state suffers before the body

Overweight children and adolescents are often teased, bullied, insulted, abused, marginalised and rejected. Often they are not allowed to play with other children. They are not cool enough to be part of the group. This can reinforce their feeling of "I am not OK as I am". Their self-esteem can suffer. Parents can also contribute to this if they blame their child for their obesity and insult them because they eat sweets or sit too long in front of the screen etc. Ostracism, insults, abuse adversely affect a child's mental well-being. And this, in turn, can promote anxiety, depression and eating disorders.

## It is not just predisposition

A child's predisposition to being overweight is inherited. That is why some children tend to be more overweight than others. But weight also depends on a person's behaviour. More specifically, the number of calories your child consumes through food and drink, and the number of calories they expend through exercise. Stress, time sat in front of a screen, or the length of sleep can also affect a child's weight.

Your family's lifestyle affects your own weight and your child's weight too. You are a role model for your child. How do you behave?

- Do you eat vegetables or salad every day?
- Do you usually eat whole-grain bread?
- Do you mainly drink water?
- How often do you exercise in a week?
- Do you usually take the lift and escalator instead of the stairs?
- How many steps have you walked today?
- For what kind of distances do you take the car?
- Do you like to spend your free time in front of the screen?



### FAMILY ON THE SPOT

**Do you always make your child feel loved – just as they are?** Do you help your child when they are bullied and marginalised? Do you listen empathetically, and work together to find solutions?

Regional school advisory centres, (school) psychological counselling centres, family counselling centres, children's and adolescent psychologists can all help.

1/3

>>

## Will they grow out of obesity?

Children shoot up in growth spurts. A child with “puppy fat” can turn into a tall, lanky teenager. But children “stretch” differently. Excess weight does not always disappear as the child grows. It can often persist, especially if your child is seriously overweight.



## Is my child actually overweight? And, if so, to what extent?

Do not visually assess your child’s weight. You can easily misjudge it. It is not enough to weigh them either. Weight is measured by a person’s Body Mass Index, abbreviated to BMI. This figure takes into account a person’s weight and height. In children, the BMI alone is not sufficient to assess weight. You also need to consider their growth. Only then can you tell whether your child is the right weight or is overweight.

**It is best if your child’s doctor or healthcare professional assesses their weight.**

They will determine to what extent your child is overweight and also check any risk of disease. Are there already concomitant diseases? Is further investigation necessary? A medical examination will also take into account how your child has developed so far and whether there is a predisposition to obesity within the family. Sometimes a binge eating disorder can be the cause of obesity even in children and adolescents. Your child will binge regularly on food and will feel that they cannot stop eating. If you are dealing with a binge eating disorder, then it needs to be treated first.

**Note:** Is your child overweight, but not yet obese and not suffering from concomitant diseases? Then it is often enough if your child maintains this weight and grows out of it over time. Deposits of fat and excess weight are reduced with growth. This requires your support (see Family Tips on page 14).



BMI calculator at  
[www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de](http://www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de)  
 (“When things get tougher ...” tab).  
 This lets you check whether your child is the right weight, overweight, or obese.

## Special therapy programs can help with obesity

### Who are therapy programs aimed at?

There are outpatient retraining programs that children suffering from obesity or severe obesity can attend with their parents. There is also an option of inpatient rehabilitation, which also achieves considerable weight loss. However, this therapeutic success cannot be sustained without intensive further treatment and without significant changes to the family's lifestyle. Rehabilitation alone should therefore not be elected as the treatment for obesity. Discuss with your child's doctor or healthcare provider what treatment programs are available for your child.



### What do therapy programs hope to achieve?

**Change habits:** Changing weight means changing habits that lead to a child being overweight. Therapy programs aim to support the child and family in changing critical behaviours, learning new behaviour and turning them into habits. They deal with behaviours relating to diet, exercise and the use of screen media.

**Promote healthy development:** Therapy programs aim to promote a child's healthy physical and mental development, positively reinforce their attitude towards life, and thus improve their quality of life.

**Reinforce health:** They set out to prevent weight-related diseases. If diseases are already present, therapy attempts to improve them.

**Lower body fat:** Therapy programs look at excess weight (BMI) and body fat. Body fat needs to be reduced. The child does not always need to lose weight to do so. Often it is enough if the child maintains their weight, reduces their fat, builds up muscles and grows out of their overweight condition over time. A doctor can use a special measurement to determine whether the amount of fat is decreasing.

### How do they do this?

- Children and their parents learn which foods and quantities form part of a balanced diet. They practice eating sweets, snacks, sweet drinks and fast food sensibly.
- Lots of sports and exercise are involved too! But your child doesn't just exercise in the treatment program or in the rehabilitation clinic per se. Your child also learns to do more exercise in everyday life and spend less time sitting down in front of different media.
- But the programs communicate more than just knowledge. Habits are examined and new behaviour is learned and practised.
- Moods and feelings affect our behaviour. Eating can be the answer to frustration, boredom or stress. The programs discuss these critical situations and develop and try out strategies to combat them.
- Your child's self-confidence will be reinforced and they will learn to be aware of their own needs.
- Parents also receive training. After all, they are the role models for their child, they are responsible for their health and for healthy behaviour in the family. The extent to which parents are involved depends on the age of the child. With young children, it may be useful to only educate parents.
- Medical supervision and medical examinations are an integral part of these programs.

### Who offers outpatient retraining programs?

Outpatient retraining programs are offered by hospitals, societies, public health authorities, doctors, healthcare agencies and healthcare organisations. Parents and children meet regularly in a group. The programs often run for 6 to 12 months. The child takes part in the course, but remains at home in their family environment (nursery school, school etc.) Applications can be submitted for outpatient retraining programs to be approved by health insurance companies if you meet certain requirements. Parents or the young person should contact their health insurance company to enquire in advance whether the retraining program will be paid for by the health insurance fund.



### FAMILY ON THE SPOT

**Changing habits is not easy.** It cannot be done in a matter of weeks. Therapy alone cannot achieve this. Your child needs your help and support no matter how old they are. You need to get involved and change your own habits. You are responsible for healthy habits within the family. Maintain a healthy lifestyle. That is good for the health of all family members.

### Who offers rehabilitation treatments?

Rehabilitation treatments are offered by specialist rehabilitation clinics. Rehabilitation usually lasts 4 to 6 weeks. Rehabilitation clinics provide therapy and also provide school lessons. Rehabilitation is paid for by statutory pension insurance or by a health insurance company (e.g. if the parents do not have a statutory pension). Requirement: An application is made by the parents and approved by the pension insurance company.

Intensive follow-up treatment is important following rehabilitation to maintain weight loss. This follow-up treatment is not automatic. It is therefore important to organise it before applying for rehabilitation. Your health insurance company, your child's doctor or healthcare provider, or even family counselling services, may be able to help. Also contact the rehabilitation clinic for follow-up care.

#### Application forms for rehabilitation can be found at:

- [www.kinder-und-jugendreha-im-netz.de/reha-antrag-stellen](http://www.kinder-und-jugendreha-im-netz.de/reha-antrag-stellen)
  - [www.deutsche-rentenversicherung.de](http://www.deutsche-rentenversicherung.de)
- Key words:** Child rehabilitation forms, Form G0200 (Application for rehabilitation services for children and adolescents) and Form G0612 (Medical report for the application for rehabilitation services for children and adolescents); arrange a consultation appointment at [www.eservice-drv.de](http://www.eservice-drv.de)

#### FROM CONSULTATION TO REHABILITATION TREATMENT



A doctor or healthcare professional will recommend a rehabilitation treatment and advise the parents and their child.



A doctor or healthcare professional then prepares the report and application for fees and completes the relevant forms (G0612). (A doctor or healthcare professional completes the "Ordinance on Medical Rehabilitation" form if applying to a health insurance company).



The parents complete application forms (G0200) and submit them together with the report and the doctor's fee application (support when applying can be provided by the advisory offices of the German Pension Insurance Society (arrange an appointment at [www.eservice-drv.de](http://www.eservice-drv.de)) or by your health insurance company).



The pension insurance company (or health insurance company) then makes a decision about the application and allocates a suitable rehabilitation clinic. The date for rehabilitation is then arranged between the clinic and the parents.

### Where can I find treatment and providers?

Contact your health insurance provider if you are looking for a treatment program or provider in your area. The Obesity in Children and Adolescents Society also lists inpatient and outpatient treatment facilities on its website [www.adipositas-gesellschaft.de/aga](http://www.adipositas-gesellschaft.de/aga).

### How do I know if a therapy program is good?

You need to consider a number of requirements when it comes to good retraining programs and rehabilitation treatments. Here are just a few: The concept has to be right, the premises need to be suitable. The treatment needs to be interdisciplinary, that is: different experts working together (doctors, sports teachers, physiotherapists, nutritionists, psychologists and psychotherapists). Parents need to be involved. The results must be recorded in writing. The doctor, healthcare professional or the health insurance company can help with the treatment program.

Certification by the Obesity in Children and Adolescents Society (AGA) sheds light on the quality of retraining programs and rehabilitation treatments. Certification requires providers to provide evidence of their qualifications.

### CAUTION:

**You still need to clarify in advance that the health insurance company will cover the cost even if the outpatient training program is certified. Outpatient training centres will often handle this.**

### Support and stick with it

Your child will have learned and trained new behaviour in rehab. A rehabilitation follow-up treatment is important to continue practising what your child has learned and integrate it into everyday life in a lasting way. It is best to organise this before the rehab treatment. Family counselling centres, health insurance companies, your child's doctor or healthcare provider may be able to help you find treatment local to you.

Children need the support of their parents to stick with this in everyday life. Some suggestions for new habits becoming routine at home:

- Help your child find a sport that suits them and training conditions that make them feel comfortable. Taking your child to the class is a further way of supporting them. Apps, such as step counters or exercise apps, can help children to become more active.
- Plan more time for walking or cycling.
- Do not buy sweets, nibbles and sugary drinks.
- Always have fruit and vegetables in the house.
- Make water your family's main drink.
- Has your child found new meals that they like in rehab or in the training program? Incorporate them into your family meals.
- Eat together as often as possible, turning off all screens. Talk to each other. What happened today? What are they planning? What is on your child's mind?



## My child is overweight - what should I do?

Children carrying a little excess weight with no risk factors can participate in measures that address nutrition, exercise and stress management, and generally promote health. They are offered by sports clubs, health insurance companies and advice centres, among other places. You will need to clarify in individual cases whether the cost will be borne by your health insurance company.

Support your child within the family so that their weight slowly moves in the right direction.

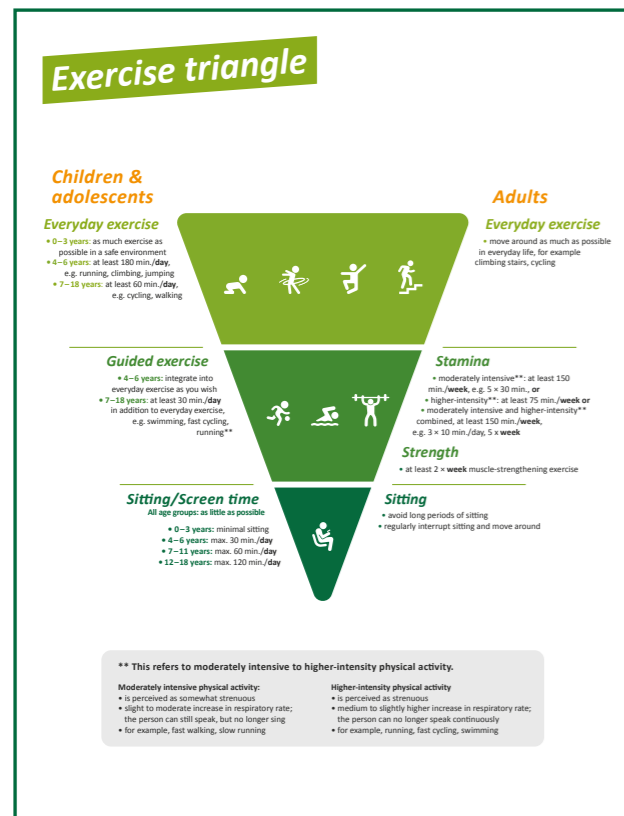
### Nutrition

- Eat regularly, but not constantly
- Eat lots of vegetables, fruit, whole grains (5 servings of vegetables and fruit daily are the goal)
- Eat very little sweet and fatty food
- Drink water instead of lemonade or juice

The Nutrition Working Group of the German Nutrition Society (DGE) explains what a wholegrain and balanced diet looks like. A detailed information sheet can be requested from [www.dge.de](http://www.dge.de).

### Exercise and leisure time

- Exercise regularly in everyday life (walk or cycle to nursery school, and use stairs instead of lifts)
- Get involved in sports (sports clubs and fitness centres have lots to offer. Sometimes there are special offers for children who are overweight).
- Relax and get enough sleep. Introduce fixed resting periods.
- Turn off the TV and computer more often and read a book or play games instead. Switch off screens for the last hour before your child goes to bed.
- Do more exercise than sitting in front of a screen



The exercise triangle shows what exercise and how much exercise is good. Screen times are intended as a guide for parents. Information can be downloaded from [www.bzga.de](http://www.bzga.de), by searching for "Information materials".

## A good environment at nursery school and school

Healthy food, encouragement to move around in class or during breaks, and opportunities for relaxation can also promote a healthy weight. Ask and encourage change. The BZgA's "IN GOOD SHAPE" campaign shows professionals how to inspire children and young people in their establishments to adopt a healthier lifestyle (more at

[www.gutdrauf.net](http://www.gutdrauf.net)). However, there are many more certificates, including "Good healthy school", "Health-promoting school", "Class of 2000" or "Sporty nursery school". They certify that the promotion of health is important to these establishments.



### FAMILY ON THE SPOT

**Change your lifestyle as a family.** Set yourself small goals and take one step at a time. As a family, think about what you want to change first and what you all need to do to achieve this. This might be a joint exercise

day at the weekend (even in bad weather) or making a change at breakfast. Don't be discouraged by setbacks. Don't give up. Changing habits takes time.

## Information and useful tips

### [www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de](http://www.uebergewicht-vorbeugen.de)

You will find a wealth of useful information and ideas here to prevent obesity or weight gain after a treatment.

### [www.adipositas-gesellschaft.de/aga](http://www.adipositas-gesellschaft.de/aga)

The Obesity in Children and Adolescents Society (AGA) website has lots of information on obesity and the current scientific guidelines on diagnostics, therapy and prevention of obesity.

### [www.gutdrauf.net](http://www.gutdrauf.net)

Information on "IN GOOD SHAPE" ("GUT DRAUF"), a campaign initiated by the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) for children and adolescents aged from 5 to 18. It is aimed at institutions and professionals who work with and teach young people in nursery schools, schools, youth institutions etc. The aim is to establish lasting healthy practices and infrastructures in the lives of children and adolescents.

### [www.bke.de](http://www.bke.de)

The Federal Conference for Educational Counselling e.V. (BKE) website provides a directory of educational and family counselling centres (search for Counselling centres).

### [www.bkj.de](http://www.bkj.de)

The Professional Association of Children's and Adolescent Psychotherapists and Children's and Adolescents' Psychotherapists lists therapists near you.

### Nummer gegen Kummer – Parents advice hotline

0800 111 0 550

Monday to Friday from 9.00 to 11.00,

Tuesday and Thursday from 17.00 to 19.00



## Publication

### PUBLISHER:

Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), Cologne, Germany

### RESPONSIBLE:

Lydia Lamers

### COPY:

Monika Cremer

### TECHNICAL SUPPORT:

**Dr. med. Rainer Stachow**

Sylt Clinic for Children and Adolescents

**Prof. Dr. Martin Wabitsch**

University Hospital Ulm, Department of Paediatric Endocrinology and Diabetology

### DESIGN:

Helder Brand Design

[www.helder.design](http://www.helder.design)

Berlin

### EDITION:

1.10.11.21

### PRINT:

This publication has been printed climate-neutrally. Kunst- und Werbedruck GmbH & Co. KG, Hinterm Schloss 11, 32549 Bad Oeynhausen, Germany

### PHOTO CREDITS:

Cover, Thomas Barwick/DigitalVision via Getty Images

Page 2, Maya23K/iStock via Getty Images

Page 6, Rawpixel/iStock via Getty Images

Page 7, Sidekick via Getty Images

Page 8, B. Boissonnet/Corbis via Getty Images

Page 10, Cavan Images/Cavan via Getty Images

Page 10, Sarinya Pinngam/EyeEm via Getty Images

Page 10, Geber86/E+ via Getty Images

Page 10, nigelcarse/E+ via Getty Images

Page 11, Westend61 via Getty Images

Page 13, Westend61 via Getty Images

Page 14, Anna Bizon via Getty Images

## Ordering

The contents of this brochure are protected by copyright. All rights reserved.

This brochure can be ordered free of charge online at [www.bzga.de](http://www.bzga.de), by e-mail at [order@bzga.de](mailto:order@bzga.de) or by post from BZgA, 50819 Cologne, Germany.

Order number: 35421070

It is not intended for resale by the recipient or third parties.



