



ELTERN POST

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HEALTHY EATING FROM AN EARLY AGE

Practical tips on healthy eating for parents

Dear parents, guardians and families,

Children learn to eat not only through taste, but above all through example and everyday life.

From an early age, they observe what adults do: how they shop, cook, eat and enjoy food.

Healthy eating therefore does not begin on the plate, but in family life together.

And it does not have to be perfect, but above all suitable for everyday use, loving and relaxed.

*Your team from the Kinderschutzbund
Landesverband Bayern*



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WHY HEALTHY EATING IS SO IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN

Children grow quickly, are active and curious, and need energy, vitamins, minerals and fluids to do so.

Food not only nourishes the body, but also boosts concentration, mood and growth.

Good eating habits in childhood often have a lifelong effect.

It's not just about what's on the plate, but how food is eaten: children need structure, patience and enjoyment when eating.



EATING IS MORE THAN JUST FILLING YOUR STOMACH; IT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

Shared meals are important family moments.

They offer closeness, exchange and orientation in everyday life.

Even small rituals such as saying grace, setting the table or preparing meals together promote a feeling of security and belonging.

Children who eat regularly with their family are more likely to try new foods and develop a healthy relationship with food.

Their language skills also benefit when there is conversation and laughter at the table.

Of course, it is often difficult to get everyone around the table in everyday life, with shift work, appointments, long nursery or school schedules.

But even one meal together a day is valuable. Even with just one parent.

Tip: Switch off the television, tablet and mobile phone during meals or put them away. Even if things don't always go smoothly, it doesn't have to be perfect. Children are allowed to try, experiment and make mistakes.



WHAT HELPS IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

Attitude matters: If you as parents have a relaxed, positive attitude to eating, your children will be able to develop one too.

Regular meals: 3 main meals + 2 snacks if necessary.

Not always available: This helps children learn to better feel hunger and satiety. Take sufficient breaks in between (approx. 2-3 hours).

Offer new food more often: in various forms (steamed, puréed, finely chopped, etc.). Eat with them: children are influenced by what they see.

Let them decide for themselves: The child decides what and how much to eat.

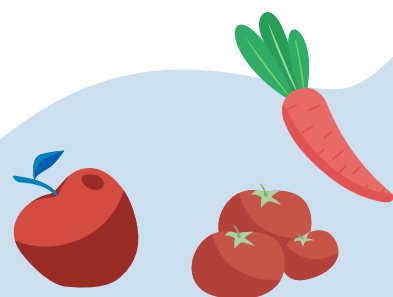
Not every whinge is hunger: Sometimes it's more about a need for closeness or just being bored.

Mealtimes as conversation time: While eating, we talk to each other as a family about positive topics.

Drinking allowed: Drinking is also permitted with meals.

When you're done, you are allowed to stand up: Preschooler do not have to remain seated until everyone has finished. They are permitted to get up and play when they are full.

Children are allowed to express their wishes: Sometimes we have the children's favourite meals, and everyone can request something they would like to eat. We can create a weekly meal plan together and hang it on the fridge.





ATTENTION! THE FOLLOWING IS NOT HELPFUL:

- Always forcing children to eat: Children cannot develop their own sense of hunger
- Always forcing children to finish their meals: Children cannot develop their own sense of satiety
- Always completely banning certain foods, such as meat or sweets: Children overeat to the point of vomiting when they get hold of these foods somewhere and start eating them secretly
- Always eating on the go and while playing: children cannot develop a healthy sense of hunger, satiety, mindful eating and eating as a social activity
- Constantly reprimanding children about their eating habits and questioning them (who, what, when) or talking about school: this spoils children's enjoyment of eating together and makes eating seem like something negative

TIP: If difficulties with eating habits develop or you have concerns, seek advice from experts.





WHAT CONSTITUTES A BALANCED DIET FOR CHILDREN?

Drinking:

- Children aged between 4 and 10 should drink around 800 ml to one litre per day
- Best options: water or unsweetened tea
- Highly diluted fruit juice spritzers (1:3) are an alternative
- Avoid sweet drinks, as they provide empty calories

Vegetables & fruit:

- Five portions per day, as colourful and varied as possible, e.g. a small banana for breakfast, strips of pepper as a snack, a portion of broccoli for lunch, an apple in the afternoon, and a few slices of cucumber for dinner.
- Vegetables can also be enjoyed in sauces, casseroles, raw or puréed.
- A beautifully arranged plate often works wonders!

Cereals & potatoes:

- Whole grain products keep you feeling full longer and provide fibre
- Potatoes are best boiled or baked, not fried
- Pasta, oatmeal and rice are simple, healthy sources of energy

Dairy products:

- Milk, yoghurt and cheese every day, preferably natural, except in cases of existing intolerances or allergies
- Natural yoghurt with fresh fruit is better than children's products such as Fruchtzwerg, Quetschi and Milchschnitte. These contain extremely high levels of sugar, which is unhealthy for teeth and the body (obesity)





Meat, fish & egg:

- Fish once a week: ideally salmon or herring, boneless
- Lean meat (turkey, chicken) 2-3 times a week, sausage rather rarely
- Eggs: up to five times a week
- Plant-based alternatives such as lentil spread, hummus or nut butter add variety

Fats & Sweets:

- Prefer vegetable oils such as rapeseed or olive oil
- Less is more: snacks and ready meals often contain hidden fats, for example in puff pastry or ready-made salad dressings
- Sweets are allowed, but it is best to have strict 'snacking rules', e.g. 'dessert is after lunch'.
- Healthy alternatives: dried fruit, oat and fruit bars.

NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN DIETS

A diet without meat, fish and sausage is perfectly possible for children, provided that they get the right nutrients. Make sure they get enough iron, zinc, protein B12 and healthy fats.

Good plant-based sources are:

- Oats, millet, wholemeal bread
- Legumes (e.g. lentils, chickpeas)
- Spinach, courgettes, oatmeal, nuts/nut butter



A purely vegan diet is much more challenging. It carries the risk of deficiencies in:

Calcium, iron, iodine, selenium, zinc, vitamins D, B2 and B12, and omega-3 fatty acids

Important: Always seek medical or nutritional advice when feeding children a vegan diet to avoid deficiency symptoms and ensure the child's healthy development.

A GOOD BREAKFAST, A GOOD START:

Breakfast is important, but often there is not enough time in the morning. Those who eat breakfast together start the day more relaxed. Children prefer to eat when they have company.

Tip: From pre-school age onwards, assign age-appropriate small tasks such as making breakfast, cutting fruit, preparing sandwiches and setting the table. This provides structure and fun and teaches the value of togetherness.

EATING RITUALS AND SETTING AN EXAMPLE:

Children learn best through what they see. Eating together sends a message that food is valuable: even if it gets messy sometimes, small rituals, loving interaction and clear structures give children a sense of security.

Show your enjoyment of food and try new things yourself. Let children eat in peace, without pressure or coercion.



No need to worry

- Children discover food through play, which takes time
- Rejection is normal; simply offer it more often in a different form
- No coercion, no reward system with food

Important information for young children

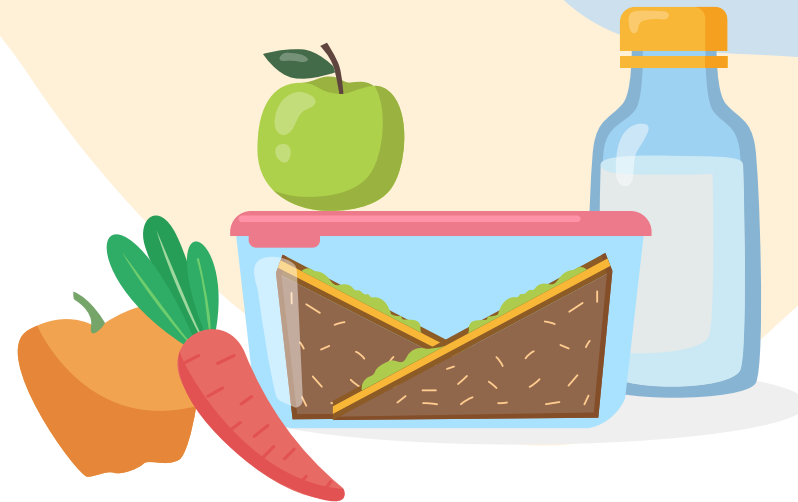
- Choking hazard: no whole nuts, raw hard vegetables, sweets, grapes with seeds
- Avoid Quetschis: they contain a lot of sugar and the lack of chewing is bad for jaw and speech development
- It is better to cut food into small pieces and offer soft foods

RECIPE IDEAS:

Simple vegetable pasta bake:

Ingredients: Wholemeal pasta, vegetables (e.g. courgette, peppers, carrots), a little cream cheese, cheese for gratinating

Preparation: Cut the vegetables into small pieces and sauté, mix with cooked pasta and cream cheese, sprinkle with cheese and bake in the oven.



Colourful packed lunch:

A healthy packed lunch is filling, tasty and provides energy.

- A slice of wholemeal bread (e.g. spread with cream cheese, butter or hummus)
- 1-2 slices of cucumber or bell pepper on top
- Some fruit (e.g. apple slices or a few seedless grapes)
- A small piece of cheese or other alternatives
- To drink: water or unsweetened tea in a drinking bottle

It's best to pack everything in small, colourful boxes to keep it fresh and make it look appetising.

Tip: Let your child help you prepare their lunch box to make them more excited about eating.



Food to go:

- Finely chopped peeled apples in a box with a lid
- Blueberries in a box with a lid
- Finely chopped peeled cucumbers in a box with a lid
- Bananas
- Corn waffles
- Drinking bottle or drinking cup with water

Example of a daily routine:

- Breakfast: Muesli with fresh fruit
- Snack: Vegetable sticks, yoghurt with fresh fruit, wholemeal bread
- Lunch: Oat/vegetable patties with broccoli and mashed potatoes
- Dinner: Vegetable soup with wholemeal bread or wholemeal bread with cheese

Children should also drink 6–8 glasses of water per day to stay well hydrated. Sugary drinks and snacks should be the exception.

SUGAR – WHY LESS IS MORE

Children love sweets, which is perfectly normal. However, too much sugar is unhealthy and can harm children in the long term. It is not only found in sweets, but also in many drinks, yoghurts and snacks. Lemonades and sweet juices in particular often contain as much sugar as several sugar cubes per glass, without you even noticing.

High sugar consumption can cause the following in children:

- Increased risk of obesity
- High blood pressure, diabetes and fatty liver disease
- Damage to teeth
- Impaired concentration
- Long-term effects on mental development.





Studies show that children who frequently eat sugary and unbalanced diets perform worse in intelligence tests than children who eat healthy meals.

This does not mean that sweets are forbidden. An ice cream or a piece of cake is fine once in a while, but it is important that it remains the exception. Small, unsweetened snacks are much better.

Tip: Check the list of ingredients, as there is often more sugar than you might think.

Furthermore, banning sugar often makes sweets even more appealing or leads to secret snacking. It is important to find the right balance.

CONCLUSION: EVERYDAY, COLOURFUL & TOGETHER

Healthy eating doesn't have to be perfect.

More important are:

- Shared meals
- A relaxed atmosphere
- Varied, simple dishes
- Good role models

OFFERS OF HELP:

Buchempfehlung:

- Kinderernährung: Das Standardwerk für eine gesunde Entwicklung
→ *Dr. Annette Kast-Zahn; Dr. Hartmut Morgenroth*
- Gesund essen macht schlau: Ernährung für Kinder und Jugendliche → *Dagmar von Cramm*
- Was Kinder essen brauchen: Gesund ernähren leicht gemacht
→ *Edith Gätjen*

Internetlinks:

- Vegetarische Ernährung für Kinder | kindergesundheit-info.de
→ <https://www.kindergesundheit-info.de/themen/ernaehrung/1-6-jahre/vegetarische-ernaehrung/>
- Familienmahlzeiten | kindergesundheit-info.de
→ <https://www.kindergesundheit-info.de/themen/ernaehrung/gesund-ernaehrungsverhalten/familienmahlzeiten/>
- Zucker macht Kinder krank
→ <https://www.zentrum-der-gesundheit.de/news/ernaehrung-news/allgemein-ernaehrung/kinder-zucker>
- Ernährung im Kleinkind- bis ins Vorschulalter | kindergesundheit-info.de
→ <https://www.kindergesundheit-info.de/themen/ernaehrung/1-6-jahre/>
- Gut essen und trinken | DGE
→ <https://www.dge.de/gesunde-ernaehrung/gut-essen-und-trinken/>
- Für Sie und Ihr Kleinkind- Gesund ins Leben
→ <https://www.gesund-ins-leben.de/fuer-familien/fuer-sie-und-ihr-kleinkind/>



Whether at breakfast, dinner or snack time, children develop healthy eating habits through repetition, guidance and love.



COURSES, CONTACTS AND ADVICE CENTERS:

- Nummer gegen Kummer Elterntelefon → 0800 111 0 550
- Step-Beratungstelefon → 0211 81 97 10 81
- Online-Familienberatung der Caritas
→ <https://www.caritas.de/hilfeundberatung/onlineberatung/eltern-familie/start>
- bke-Elternberatung (online)
→ <https://eltern.bke-beratung.de/views/home/index.html>
- Starke Eltern – Starke Kinder-Elternkurse
→ <https://sesk.de/kurs-suche/>
- Familienpat*innen
→ <https://www.familienpaten-bayern.de/informationeninteressierte-fampa-bayern/fuer-familien-fampa-bayern.html>

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