

Plattform Ernährung und Bewegung e.V. (i.Gr.)

(Platform Diet and Physical Activity)

## Founding Programme



### *“In balance – for a healthy life”*

#### Diet and physical activity – a challenge for our entire society

Sufficient physical activity and a balanced diet are important prerequisites for a healthy life as they create the necessary balance between the intake and expenditure of calories.

Studies of preschool and school children from different Länder in Germany reveal an acute increase in the number of obese children – roughly 10-15% of all children are already obese when they start school. However, representative national data are not yet available. This development – which is also an observed trend in other European countries – is highly disconcerting. Supporting children and young people and their families in the development of a healthy lifestyle has therefore become a challenge for our entire society.

Scientists and practitioners agree that preventive measures must begin at an early age. The affected children are at high risk of remaining obese throughout their adult lives. Roughly half of all seriously obese children and young people suffering from adiposita are burdened with one or more risk factors such as hyperinsulinaemia. This typically leads to diseases such as hypertension, lipid metabolic disorders and diseases of the musculoskeletal system or diabetes mellitus type 2, actually known as “adult diabetes”. In addition to the physiological consequences, there are psychosocial problems and possible restrictions to general performance.

Various studies of the physical capabilities of children and young people in Germany show that their motor abilities have distinctly deteriorated over the last three decades – the average decrease has been about 10%. Today, children and young people run slower than they once did, their mobility has measurably diminished.

These developments can permanently impair the health, quality of life and personal opportunities of the affected children and young people. They will result in new demands and burdens on the health system.

### *Changed framework conditions for the energy balance*

Many factors play a role in the development of overweight and obesity. Individual risk is firstly very dependent on the individual genetic disposition. However, this cannot explain the observed spread of overweight and obesity as a phenomenon within one generation. Rather, societal trends of recent decades are one of the major factors which have led to changes in lifestyle with repercussions on the physiological energy balance.

The most important reason for decreasing physical performance is insufficient physical activity in everyday life, even though the majority of all children and young people do sports. For most people in Germany, as in other technologically developed countries, the daily routine rarely involves high caloric expenditure through physical exertion.

For some years, leisure time as well has increasingly been distinguished by sedentary activities; nearly every household has televisions and computers. Spending leisure time outdoors “on the doorstep” and with plenty of physical activity is becoming ever more seldom. Appealing playgrounds and physical activity spaces for children, in particular in cities, are often quite a distance from home and can often only be reached with adult assistance. Furthermore, the quality and intensity of physical activity offered in schools and sport clubs is not always adapted to the needs of the children and young people.

Children and young people grow up within a society in which sitting is dominant - in school, at the workplace and during leisure time, and even when moving from one place to another in motorized means of transport.

On the one hand, human caloric expenditure has decreased, yet on average caloric intake has remained the same as it was when intense physical activity was predominant in daily life. Food choice and preparation and even eating habits – whether in private households or away from home – often do not take the decreased energy requirement into account.

New life patterns, less traditional roles within the family and the employment of both parents can, in addition, impede targeted reorientation to favourable dietary habits. The lack of family mealtimes is considered to be a risk factor for the development of overweight and obesity. Schools and day-care facilities often do not offer suitable meals or the meals offered require improvement.

Today, children and young people are often faced with the necessity of organizing their food and drinks themselves, and they have the opportunity to do so almost everywhere. They encounter a generous and easily accessible offer of all types of foods. However, in many cases they are not able to select a balance of foods suitable to their needs.

In spite of extensive information offered to the population on the principles of healthy diet and the importance of getting enough physical activity, there is often a gulf between the information offered and actual knowledge on the one hand and the habits practiced by people on the other. In addition, sound knowledge about food and food preparation no longer exists in many households.

Socially weaker families, in particular, are harder to reach with dietary and physical activity recommendations. Immigrant-background families often cannot take advantage of advisory offers due to language barriers. Children from families of certain cultural traditions may therefore encounter problems in making use of physical activity offers.

## The Platform – alliance of social forces

### *Commitment of the Platform members*

On this basis, the members of the Platform Diet and Physical Activity work towards preventing overweight and obesity in children and young people. The Platform unites social forces from very diverse fields, which have the mutual concern of promoting healthy lifestyles for children and young people. The members will make use of their specific possibilities, resources and structures to implement the jointly established objectives, fields of action and concrete measures.

The central aim of Platform work is the prevention of overweight and obesity. In order to attain lasting prevention one central task is to use suitable, targeted measures and activities to strengthen children and young people in their skills and their decision-making abilities in favour of a healthy lifestyle.

For this reason, the Platform equally advocates practical assistance and suitable framework conditions, which help children and young people – and their adult role models – to decide for a health-promoting lifestyle, a long-term suitable diet and physical activity habits. There are starting points for this in many areas – e.g. within the families, in kindergartens and schools, at the workplace, in the food sector, in sport, local planning, in the health system and in the fields of education and further training.

### *Cooperation*

The persuasiveness and dynamics needed to change the lifestyles of children, young people and their families depend on the degree of cooperation of many different players. Joint commitment can contribute to making the problem known throughout society and establishing the necessary changes.

The prerequisites for the successful work of the Platform Diet and Physical Activity therefore include the networking of the dedicated actors with their various approaches and initiatives as well as the utilization of existing structures. Interdisciplinary links between academic fields and with practice play an important role in making new research findings available rapidly for further work. It is only on this basis that the best prevention strategies can be recognized and implemented into aligned measures of the different players. It is not a matter of “re-inventing” things that already exist and work well, but rather of perfectly using resources for the sake of the children and young people.

The Platform considers itself an open offer for cooperation in a spirit of partnership between all organizations and groups that are already active in the fields of diet and physical activity for children and young people and in disseminating a healthy lifestyle – be they on the federal, state or local level, in the health sector, in education, in science, in industry or in civil society initiatives. It is just as open to new approaches and initiatives.

## The Platform’s fields of action

All of the campaigns and projects of the Platform Diet and Physical Activity serve the objective of contributing to a healthy lifestyle and a balanced ratio of diet and physical activity via preventive measures and hence to counteract the increase in overweight and obesity. The focus is on children and young people and their parents. The Platform does not provide therapy for eating disorders; however in all measures it will take the situations of seriously overweight as well as seriously underweight children and young people into consideration.

The Platform contributes to the prevention of overweight and obesity in four fields of action:

- Clarifying causes and developing “good practices”;
- Conveying knowledge and training players;
- Informing the public and disseminating the work of the Platform;
- Testing new approaches.

### *Field of action: Clarifying causes and developing “good practices”*

Some questions on the development of overweight and obesity still have not been answered by science. So far, it has not yet been explained, for example, what methods can be used to achieve the best long-term success in avoiding overweight and obesity. At the same time, the subject areas of diet, physical activity and prevention are marked by complex structures and

varied parallel activities. This situation makes it more difficult to recognize and disseminate the best approaches for prevention.

In order to improve transparency about the knowledge and methods for all actors and hence promote the needed networking of players and linking of activities, the Platform sees as its primary tasks:

- to document and evaluate the national and international status of scientific findings on the causes of increasing overweight and obesity in particular among children and young people;
- to scientifically evaluate prevention activities; and
- to develop criteria and rules for “good practice” in prevention measures and projects.

To achieve these objectives, a broad spectrum of skills will be pooled in an open network of experts, which will form a competence centre for diet and physical activity.

*Field of action: Conveying knowledge and training players*

In order to prevent overweight and obesity, all relevant players need to be offered sound knowledge about a lifestyle with healthy diet and sufficient physical activity.

Parents must be strengthened in their skills and in taking up their responsibility.

Vocational groups that work professionally with children and young people, such as preschool teachers, teachers, physical activity trainers, paediatricians, dietary advisors and juvenile social workers, need qualified support for their daily, practical work.

Information and training offers for actors who shape the environment of children and young people are just as important, such as decision-makers in urban development, schools, kindergartens, athletic associations, housing construction enterprises as well as architects and local, state and federal politicians.

*Field of action: Informing the public and disseminating the work of the Platform*

The Platform organizes active media and public relations work in order to provide the population with up-to-date information and to sensitise them for a healthy lifestyle, to promote actor networking, to disseminate the work of the Platform and put the work results up to debate. The objective of the public relations work is also to support regional approaches for disseminating the Platform’s work. In this context, the Platform encourages the media to take responsibility for dealing with this topic in a qualified manner.

*Field of action: Testing new approaches*

In order to successfully address the target groups, it must be possible to test innovative approaches as well. The Platform will therefore also initiate pilot projects or campaigns for selected issues and carry them out jointly with partners.

For all campaigns and projects that directly address children and young people, those people who are in close contact with the respective age groups and their social milieu – such as parents, families and educators, but also cultural groups and sport clubs as well as other actors in the fields of youth services – are important partners of the Platform. However, the work of the Platform focuses on the children and young people and on their healthy future.

*Resolved in Berlin on 20 September 2004*

***The founding members of the Platform Diet and Physical Activity***