

FORUM

The Stiegelmeyer-Group's company magazine



Vegetables cost more than sugary snacks

07. July 2015 // Reportagen & Berichte

How many heavily overweight People are there in Germany? According to data from the last health survey conducted by the Robert Koch Institute in 2012, around 67% of men and 53% of women are overweight or obese with a body mass index of over 25. 23% of men and 24% of women are obese with a body mass index of over 30. The prevalence of obesity has continued to increase over the last two decades, particularly in men and young adults. It is considerably less prevalent in persons with a high socioeconomic status.

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Advice is given on all media channels for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Why doesn't it help more?

This information on how to lead a healthy lifestyle is heard but rarely put into practice. This could be because the information is given in the wrong place, with the wrong methods or using the wrong channels of communication. Making changes always involves giving up familiar habits.



Prof. Dr. oec. troph. Maria Elisabeth Herrmann lehrt an der Fakultät für Agrarwissenschaften und Landschaftsarchitektur der Hochschule Osnabrück.

We spoke to Prof. Dr. oec. troph. Maria-Elisabeth Herrmann about the growing problem of obesity

There are clear negative correlations between a low social status or level of education and a desirable healthy lifestyle. This means less exercise, eating less fruit and vegetables coupled with higher meat consumption and more smokers.

But don't people in Germany do an increasing amount of sport at least?

The percentage of people actively taking part in sport has increased significantly over the last 10 years or so, but 25% of people surveyed by the DEGS (Study on the health of adults in Germany) still do not attach any importance to exercise; only one fifth is physically active for the recommended 2.5 hours per week. The amount of sporting activity decreases the older people get or when circumstances change, and it is not uncommon for people to put on weight then as a reaction if people's eating habits are not adjusted to reflect the lower energy requirements.

What effect do food prices have in all this?

Our western society is characterised by the constant availability of food (including high-calorie snacks and sugary drinks). In Germany, in particular, prices regarding this are very low, particularly for highcalorie foods, while fresh fruit and vegetables are comparatively high in price. So it's a problem of income and quantity.

Do we eat only because we're hungry?

Physiological nutrition requirements (the inner signals) are often overlaid by psychosocial determinants. Opportunities and situations for eating are interpreted by the media as reflecting lifestyle and image. This does not help to maintain a healthy weight over the Long term.

What future percentage of old people and those in need of care are predicted to be heavily overweight?

It's not possible to develop useful forecasts for this. In the past 10 years, the prevalence of obesity has increased, however, particularly in children, youth and young adults. It would appear from this that a high-risk generation is growing up, but whether this continues into their old age remains pure speculation.

What maximum body weights and measurements should manufacturers of medical devices be gearing up to today and in future?

Unfortunately, there are no upper limits to weight, but overall the frequency of a high BMI is increasing in particular; this means that a body weight of plus-minus 150 to 200 kg is no longer unusual.

A person is said to be obese if his or her body mass index, or BMI for short, is over 30. The BMI is calculated by dividing the person's weight by the square of the person's height. For example, for a man who is 1.80

metres tall, obesity starts at a weight of 98 kg.

BMI= Body weight (kg) : Body height (m)²