

# healthy cooking for my kids

preventing obesity starts at an early age

*Prof. Kristel De Vogelaere*

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*Note: the flowers depicted in the photos are not edible!*



# prevention is better than cure

Having been an abdominal and bariatric surgeon for almost twenty years, I see obesity on a daily basis. Obesity is becoming ever more prevalent worldwide, with dire consequences for health which are irreversible if left untreated.

Obesity and excess weight have become significantly more common in recent years, no longer just in adults but just as much in children! The number of overweight children is alarmingly high.

As a doctor and a mother of three, I feel it is my responsibility to point out to every parent and guardian that the imminent ‘obesity pandemic’ is an acute threat, and to warn them of this real and completely underestimated danger that primarily threatens the health and lives of our children.

As parents we have a responsibility to protect our children from this danger and this is perfectly achievable if we act proactively.

A vaccine against a plague such as this doesn’t exist... We have to join forces so that, by correctly raising our children, we can tackle this major problem at the core.

I invite you all, **especially parents**, to work together so that our children may lead healthy and happy lives. Only then will we too be happy as parents and... as doctors!

This book is dedicated to all my patients. For whom prevention often came too late...  
For whom surgery was all that remained as a last resort...

Because they are not just my patients, but they are also my passion.

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In recent years the number of overweight adults and adults suffering from morbid obesity has greatly increased. Currently available statistics show that over 50% of adults in Europe are overweight and more than 20% are obese. The number of overweight children or children suffering from obesity has risen at a terrifying pace. At a European level, currently 19-50% of children and teenagers under 18 are overweight and 8-30% of children suffer from obesity, depending on the population group. Obesity and excess weight are absolutely not risk free! We cannot let this trend go unattended. Overweight children have an elevated risk of health problems such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, conditions of the locomotive system and psychosocial issues at a younger age. We also know that overweight patients have lifespans of up to ten or fifteen years shorter than normal. That is why it is more than necessary that obese children are offered help, just as obese adults are, with a special focus on **prevention**. Every parent wants their child to grow up to be a healthy adult. The basis for good health is a healthy lifestyle. It is therefore important that the eating habits and lifestyle of **the entire family** are dealt with. Parents have to actively pursue this. They are the ones who are responsible for desirable behavioural changes in the family. They have to teach their children to eat healthily, stimulate them to exercise and lead by example. This book is not, however, intended to be a diet book. With this book, I would like to speak to you as a parent directly, so that you may go through life being aware of obesity as it can creep up on anyone, often unnoticed. With this book I would like to offer you a **guide-line** so you and your little ones may walk the path to a healthy lifestyle. Going down this road together lightens the load and leads to a healthier family as a whole.

## What is obesity and how do you define it in children?

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### Definitions

Your child is obese when his or her weight is too high for their height and bone structure. In due time this can lead to health issues.

Obesity is a more extreme form of being overweight.

It is a chronic disease that often goes hand in hand with severe health risks. This illness arises from an imbalance between the amount of energy consumed and the amount used. Excess calories are stored in fatty tissue.

*'My child, beautiful child'*

It is important for parents to notice promptly if their child is overweight or suffering from obesity.

The older an obese child is, the smaller the odds are that the extra weight will disappear on its own someday.

### Calculating BMI

To determine obesity in children you cannot look to the Body Mass Index formula (BMI for short) for adults, which only takes height and weight into account. For children you must also include their gender and age. Take your child's weight (in kilograms) and divide this by their height (in metres) squared and compare the BMI value with the values shown in table 1 for their age and gender. If your value is lower than the value in the table, then your child has a healthy weight.

If the calculated value is higher than the value shown in the table, your child is overweight, or might be suffering from obesity.

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (in kg)}}{\text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}}$$

When we make this calculation for 8-year-old Sofie, who weighs 40 kilograms and is 1.33 meters tall, we get a resulting BMI of 22.62. We can see from the table that a BMI between 13.1 and 18.5 is considered 'healthy'. Her BMI of 22.62 puts her in the 'obese' section.

Calculate your own child's BMI here:

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (in kg)}}{\text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}}$$

Then you can see from the table that your own child is:

- healthy;
- overweight;
- suffering from obesity.

## BMI BOYS AND GIRLS

age	underweight		normal		overweight		obese	
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls
6 years	< 13,1	< 13,0	13,1 - 17,55	13,0 - 17,34	17,55 - 19,78	17,34 - 19,65	> 19,78	> 19,95
7 years	< 13,1	< 13,0	13,1 - 17,92	13,0 - 17,75	17,92 - 20,63	17,75 - 20,51	> 20,63	> 20,51
8 years	< 13,3	< 13,1	13,3 - 18,44	13,1 - 18,35	18,44 - 21,60	18,35 - 21,57	> 21,60	> 21,57
9 years	< 13,5	< 13,3	13,5 - 19,10	13,3 - 19,07	19,10 - 22,77	19,07 - 22,81	> 22,77	> 22,81
10 years	< 13,7	< 13,6	13,7 - 19,84	13,6 - 19,86	19,84 - 24,00	19,86 - 24,11	> 24,00	> 24,11
11 years	< 14,0	< 13,9	14,0 - 20,55	13,9 - 20,74	20,55 - 25,10	20,74 - 25,42	> 25,10	> 25,42
12 years	< 14,4	< 14,4	14,4 - 21,22	14,4 - 21,68	21,22 - 26,02	21,68 - 26,67	> 26,02	> 26,67
13 years	< 14,8	< 15,0	14,8 - 21,91	15,0 - 22,58	21,91 - 26,84	22,58 - 27,76	> 26,84	> 27,76
14 years	< 15,3	< 15,6	15,3 - 22,62	15,6 - 23,34	22,62 - 27,63	23,34 - 28,57	> 27,63	> 28,57
15 years	< 15,8	< 16,1	15,8 - 23,29	16,1 - 23,94	23,29 - 28,30	23,94 - 29,11	> 28,30	> 29,11
16 years	< 16,3	< 16,6	16,3 - 23,90	16,6 - 24,37	23,90 - 28,88	24,37 - 29,43	> 28,88	> 29,43

**TABEL 1 // BMI IN BOYS AND GIRLS BETWEEN 6 AND 16 YEARS OLD**

Source: Cole, T.J. E.a. (2000). Establishing a standard definition for child overweight and obesity worldwide: international survey. *BMJ*, 320: 1-6

# lunchbox

Your children will love it if you prepare something different than a boring sandwich for their lunch box. Make a healthy and varied lunch for your kids, but most of all make it slightly different.

Try to make the lunch in such a way that your child is always surprised when opening the lunch box. This can contain a healthy sandwich which you serve with low-fat toppings and greens.

Or do something different for a change. Your child will likely appreciate a lunch meal. You can prepare it the day before and keep it in the fridge.

Let your fantasy go wild and surprise your kids every day. Let your children get used to different tastes! Preferably, the lunch box always has some fruit and/or vegetables, because these offer the fibres and vitamins necessary for your growing child.

Put the vegetables in a separate container, so they can eat them with their fingers. Opt for carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, radishes, cucumber slices, strips of (red, yellow, green) bell pepper, cauliflower florets ...

Make the veggies more attractive by cutting out a star or heart shape with a cutting ring. This is very easy to do with cucumber and courgette.

Use the veggies to make faces on the sandwich: mini tomatoes or olives for eyes, a strip of carrot for a smile... This way your child will light up when they open their lunch box!

You can add a mixed salad to the lunch box. Remember to put the vinaigrette in a different container so the lettuce doesn't go mushy and unpleasant.

In total, each person should consume 250-300 grams of vegetables per day, of which preferably 100-150 grams of raw vegetables with lunch and 200-250 grams of cooked vegetables with dinner.

You can give them whole fruit, but surprise your child sometimes with a tasty, colourful fruit salad or fruit skewer.

A dairy product is also a plus in the lunch box: a carton of milk, yoghurt, quark with fresh fruit... are all sure hits!

As a drink you should provide water or semi-skimmed milk. A nice soup is a great alternative for your kids in autumn or winter. Limit sugary fruit juices and sugared dairy products (chocolate milk, milk with fruit flavours ...).

## TIP

Use a properly sealed lunch box so the ingredients stay fresh. Make sure the lunch box is stored in a cool place or in a fridge. If this isn't possible, the lunch box should be kept in a small cool box. There are also lunch boxes available that hold a very small cooling element.



# Cheese, ham and vegetables on wholemeal bread

## erves 1

**2 slices of wholemeal bread spread (5 g per slice of bread)**  
**1 slice of lean ham**  
**iceberg lettuce**  
**1 slice of cheese**  
**1 teaspoon of mustard**  
**10 slices of cucumber**  
**5 slices of tomato**  
**1 grated carrot**  
**pepper**  
**1 tablespoon of finely chopped chives**

Lightly spread the bread with the spread of your choice.

Place the slice of ham on the sandwich. Next, put the washed and dried leaves of iceberg lettuce on the ham.

After that, place the slice of cheese on top, with a bit of mustard and next, the cucumber slices, the tomato slices with pits removed and some grated carrot. Place a little extra iceberg lettuce on top of the tomato slices so the bread doesn't get soaked by the tomato. Season with a little pepper and garnish with chives.

Press down on the sandwich.

## How can you make an exciting lunch box every day?

- A great lunch starts with the lunch box. Choose pretty ones for your children. Let your kids decorate them with drawings or photos and their names in fancy letters.
- Choose a different type of bread every day: vary between wholegrain, brown, multigrain and nut bread ... Make sure the sandwich looks appetizing by its shape: sometimes make a square sandwich, sometimes make two triangular sandwiches or make it into any kind of shape you can think of by using different shaped cutting rings.
- Make sure the lunch box is filled with colourful foods. Always add some vegetables to the lunch box. These vegetables can be as simple as a bit of lettuce and a slice of tomato hidden away in the sandwich, but you can also make a nice veggie skewer or a tasty mixed raw salad in a well-sealed container.
- Children are crazy about desserts. Surprise them every day with a little something to catch their eye: A piece of fruit, a fruit skewer, homemade fruit salad ... Sometimes you can treat your child to a piece of candy in the lunch box.
- Add some fun children's cutlery and a colourful serviette.



**THANKS TO**

Vive Ma Maison

Serax

Philippe and Marleen Vandecasteele

*for use of the crockery and locations*

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**TEXT**

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**PHOTOGRAPHY**

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*Photo Maggie De Block page 6 ©Belga*

**DESIGN**

Inge Van Damme / [www.ingedingen.be](http://www.ingedingen.be)

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

Textcase

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© Lannoo Publishers, 2016

D/2016/45/582 – NUR 440

ISBN: 978 94 014 4073 8

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