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**WHO guidelines on physical activity: Prof. Renate Oberhoffer-Fritz calls for more exercise**

Prof. Dr. med. Renate Oberhoffer-Fritz, Dean of the Department of Sport and Health Sciences at the Technical University of Munich calls for “children and adolescents to finally get more exercise” in response to recent WHO recommendations.

According to current World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, 80 percent of children and young people do not get enough exercise. Moreover, more than five million deaths could be avoided each year if the global population exercised more often. As a result, the WHO has issued new activity recommendations for specific population groups.

Among other things, the new directive recommends that all children and young people aged between five and 17 years should be active for at least 60 minutes a day with a moderate to high intensity level. High-intensity activities and those that strengthen the muscles and bones should also be pursued at least three days a week. Physical activity levels in children and young people are linked to improved physical, mental and cognitive health.

The new guidelines also recommend limiting the time children and young people spend in a sitting position. This particularly applies to the time they spend on their mobile phone or in front of the computer.

Prof. Dr. med. Renate Oberhoffer-Fritz, Dean of the Department of Sport and Health Sciences at the Technical University of Munich (TUM), heads the Chair of Preventive Pediatrics, whose research focus is the prevention of diseases, especially of the cardiovascular system, in childhood and in adolescence.

This involves investigating cardiovascular risk factors in children, adolescents, young adults, and pregnant women. In addition, the department establishes non-invasive, age- and gender-specific reference data and identifies determinants determining the fitness of young athletes to participate in sports. Movement concepts are developed and prevention programs are evaluated for healthy and chronically ill children and young people.

In her capacity as Dean of the Faculty and holder of the Chair of Preventive Paediatrics, Prof. Oberhoffer-Fritz categorizes the new WHO activity recommendations.

Prof. Dr. med. Renate Oberhoffer-Fritz on...

...the feasibility of the new WHO activity recommendations for children and young people:

“The current WHO recommendations for 2020 assume an average physical activity level of 60 minutes per day - distributed as desired throughout the week, in the area of moderate to heavy exercise mainly in the field of endurance. This can be achieved by taking part in sports lessons at school or in a club, but also by walking or cycling to and from

school every day and by playing all kinds of sports during breaks (ball games, catching games, etc.). For children and young people who have been rather inactive up until now, there is still an encouraging message: Every kind of movement is better than none at all! This also applies to children and young people with chronic diseases or disabilities, who are also mentioned as a target group in the WHO recommendations”.

...the positive effects of regular exercise and activity on children and young people:

“Regular exercise in childhood and adolescence has positive physiological and functional effects on the developing organism, for example on muscle growth and bone density, on the performance of the cardiovascular system and lung function as well as on the metabolism of sugar and lipids. It also affects executive functions such as balance, dexterity, fine and gross motor skills, mental health and ultimately, also brain performance. Anyone who regularly exercises and takes part in sports as a child usually adopts this lifestyle into adulthood. By the way, these effects are partially already applied in the cradle: Physical activity during pregnancy contributes to the health of the offspring - which is why the WHO is making its first specific recommendations in this area.

...measures to motivate children and young people to be more active and physically active:

“In this context, safe, movement-friendly facilities in the immediate vicinity, such as safe cycle paths, attractively designed playgrounds, and reasonably equipped sports halls, play a major role. However, it is also important for parents to set a good example by actively organizing weekends, as well as for schools and clubs to offer a wide range of modern sports activities.”

...the impact of progressive digitization and the development of eSports on the physical activity of children and young people:

“As a sporting use of video games, eSports involves a certain amount of motor activity, tactical thinking, and communication skills, but can by no means replace sport and exercise. However, the use of digital technologies can help to promote physical activity, for example through app-controlled movement interventions or using digital maps”.

...the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the WHO recommendations for children and adolescents: “In general, increased sedentary behavior is to be expected during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the new WHO guidelines, this should not exceed a certain age-appropriate level because it does not promote good health, on the contrary, it is actually harmful to health. According to the new WHO guidelines, this should not exceed a certain age-appropriate level because it does not promote good health, on the contrary, it is actually harmful to health. Initial study results from Canada confirm this”.

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