

Nutritional treat or trick?

Is young child formula a must? And how many children drink it? The BfR KiESEL study answers these questions and provides other facts concerning the nutrition of young children.

What do children eat today, and how much?

These results regarding the consumption of young child formula are provided by the BfR KiESEL study. KiESEL stands for "Kinder-Ernährungsstudie zur Erfassung des Lebensmittelverzehr" (The Children's Nutrition Survey to Record Food Consumption). The study examined the diet of children throughout Germany from the age of six months up to and including five years. The aim of the KiESEL study: to obtain the latest data on children's food consumption to be able to assess the health risks of dietary habits as accurately as possible. But why the focus on children in this age range? "Young children's food intake in relation to their body weight is higher than in adults", says nutritionist Nowak. "So it is particularly important for us to determine precise exposure data from children in this early phase of life, i.e. which foods they eat, and how much."

Ready to eat with the BfR

Between 2014 and 2017, the study team visited a total of 1,104 families throughout Germany and interviewed them about their offspring's eating habits. Food diaries, in which the parents and childcare facilities documented exactly what the children ate and drank for four days, provided additional information. The data obtained allow us to perform realistic estimations on the quantities of nutrients and – of particular interest to the BfR – additives, pesticide residues and undesirable substances ingested by children through foods. By doing so, the BfR can examine whether the levels permitted are safe or should be further limited. The KiESEL study thus contributes to further improvement of food safety for children.

By the way: according to the BfR, young child formula is unnecessary in a balanced toddler diet. In Germany, with a few exceptions (vitamin D, iodine and in some cases iron), young children obtain sufficient amounts of micronutrients through the normal diet, including cow's milk. The consumption of young child formula can thus lead to an unnecessarily and even undesirably high intake of micronutrients. ■

"Formulated to meet the nutritional needs of young children" – claims such as this are frequently found on the packaging of drinks for young children. Often also labelled as "young child milk", these drinks generally contain less protein than cow's milk and are fortified with vitamins and nutrients. They are thus often promoted as being particularly suitable for children from 12 or 24 months.

Used for one- and two-year-olds

A recent study by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) shows that almost ten percent of children aged between 6 months and five years have ever had young child formula. BfR study director Nicole Nowak explains: "Children mostly started with these products at between 12 to 13 months or 18 to 24 months. The majority of children, 83 percent, receive young child formula in a feeding bottle. The products are thus used like infant formula."

More information:
www.bfr.bund.de/en > A-Z Index: KiESEL study

