

# Trends in kids' fitness not as bad as assumed

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Global increases in childhood obesity are frequently assumed to go hand-in-hand with decreased motor performance in young children. But, according to a report in *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, first graders around Baden-Baden, Germany, have remained reasonably fit over the last ten years.

"It is widely believed that [motor performance](#) of children has declined in recent years and we wanted to find out if this is really true," says Sarah Spengler, first author of the study and a researcher at the Technical University of Munich in Germany. "This study tells us that—at least in this sample—trends in motor performance in [young children](#) are not as bad as expected."

Several reports suggest that fitness among children has declined recently, but there is still little evidence to support this assumption. To further explore this question, Spengler and her colleagues tested the fitness performance of more than 5,000 first graders between the years of 2006 and 2015. Each year, roughly 500 boys and girls from primary schools around Baden-Baden were tested for their motor skills with exercises such as a 6-minute run, a 20-meter sprint, push-ups and balancing exercises. These exercises allowed the researchers to measure the children's [aerobic fitness](#), strength, speed and balance, while simultaneously serving as part of the kids' normal physical education program.

"The study results only partly supported the assumption that motor performance of children has declined," says Spengler. "Aerobic fitness has declined, but only in boys, not girls. In contrast, speed and balance have even increased in both sexes."

The researchers attribute these surprisingly positive results to the increased participation in organized sports throughout Germany over the past several years. They also suggest that the decrease in aerobic fitness among boys may result from an overall decrease in everyday physical activity and shifts to more passive forms of transportation, as shown in other studies.

It is important to note that these data represent a regional sample which is not representative of the rest of Germany, let alone other countries.

Even so, although childhood fitness may not be as bad as feared, the researchers still recommend encouraging children to exercise regularly.

"We should still focus on promoting physical activity and motor performance, especially aerobic fitness," says Spengler. "We know that most [children](#) do not engage in enough [physical activity](#), compared to current recommendations such as those of the World Health Organization."

**More information:** Sarah Spengler et al, Trends in Motor Performance of First Graders: A Comparison of Cohorts from 2006 to 2015, *Frontiers in Pediatrics* (2017). [DOI: 10.3389/fped.2017.00206](https://doi.org/10.3389/fped.2017.00206)

Provided by Frontiers

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