

“Getting Thin” (1950)

Abstract

In the early 1950s, the consequences of the so-called Economic Miracle [*Wirtschaftswunder*] could be felt in various areas of West German life. In the area of diet and nutrition, the hunger of the postwar period, only a few years in the past, was replaced by what was dubbed the *Freßwelle*, a wave of overeating. Magazines began writing about Germans’ excess weight and offered weight loss tips such as those featured in this article from the magazine *Ratgeber*.

Source

Along with whipped cream and ham rolls, chocolate and smoked eel, worries over one’s slender figure. Worries – that is actually something very different from the deep sighs that arise from a life that is too good, and which we should rather call “pangs of conscience” about the fact that we have gone a little overboard in our joy over the good things that have returned.

Be that as it may: the coat is too tight, the ladies’ suit jacket won’t button anymore, the dress is straining at the seams, and the blazer – yes, you too, gentlemen, are affected this time – can no longer be expanded by either moving buttons or taking out the seams. Our face is approaching the full moon shape; one chin has turned into a least two. Let us extend the mantle of charity over the extended backside and the hips, and Herr Müller always has to ask his young son whether his shoes are dusty, because his belly is blocking any view of what’s below.

One thing is certain: lately we have been eating too much, or, to put it more precisely, we have not been eating right. We always ate exactly what we yearned for so irresistibly after the long years of deprivation, and which so nicely adds fat. It is not the amount of food that is doing it, and so the classic recipe for slenderness “Eat half as much!” applies only with qualifications. To get slender and stay slender, all it takes is a natural way of life with a sensible, varied diet. We therefore put crops before meat products, prefer vegetables (cooked without flour and enjoyed raw, if possible), salad (without oil and bacon, but with a lot of herbs), fruit, and fruit juices. We avoid fatty meat and meat fried in fat, backed fish or fatty fish, like eel, for example, and bravely bid a temporary farewell to sweet pastries, cakes, chocolate, and other sweets. *Quark* [a kind of smooth cottage cheese] and milk, steamed fish, and hard-boiled eggs enriched our menu. Instead of beer we prefer a glass of Mosel wine, and make it a rule never to drink during the meal, but only before or in between meals and never too much.

Source: *Ratgeber* 1950, no. 9, 257; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann and Georg Wagner, eds. *Das gespaltene Land. Leben in Deutschland 1945–1990. Texte und Dokumente zur Sozialgeschichte*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993, p. 186.

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