



The Links Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development

The following are excerpts from Tufts University School of Nutrition Science and Policy document titled: **Statement on The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children**, 1998.

"Recent research provides compelling evidence that undernutrition—even in its "milder" forms—during any period of childhood can have detrimental effects on the cognitive development of children and their later productivity as adults. In ways not previously known, undernutrition impacts the behavior of children, their school performance, and their overall cognitive development. These findings are extremely sobering in the light of the existence of hunger among millions of American children."

"Undernutrition harms children silently. Even before it is severe and its results are readily detectable, inadequate food intake limits the ability of children to learn about the world around them. "

- Undernutrition along with environmental factors associated with poverty can permanently retard physical growth, brain development, and cognitive function
- The longer the child's nutritional, emotional and educational needs go unmet, the greater the likelihood of cognitive impairments.
- Iron deficiency anemia, affecting nearly 25 percent of poor children in the United States is associated with impaired cognitive development
- Poor children who attend school hungry perform significantly below non-hungry low income peers on standardized tests
- There exists a strong association between family income and the growth and cognitive development of children.
- Improved nutrition and environmental conditions can modify the effects of early undernutrition.
- Iron repletion therapy can reduce some of the effects of anemia on learning, attention and memory.
- Supplemental feeding programs can help to offset threats posed to the child's capacity to learn and perform in school which result from inadequate nutrient intake
- Once undernutrition occurs, its long-term may be reduced or eliminated by a combination of adequate food intake and environmental (home, school) support.

"Unfortunately, the effects that poor health and nutrition have on learning and educability are often not incorporated into the efforts to improve our educational system. Key educational problems such as drop outs or school failure are rarely examined in terms of the health and nutritional status of poor children."

"A number of business leaders, political leaders, medical professionals, educators and others have recently called for a new focus on children's welfare."

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