

Children with healthier diets do better in school

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A new study in the *Journal of School Health* reveals that children with healthy diets perform better in school than children with unhealthy diets.

Led by Paul J. Veugelers, MSc, PhD of the University of Alberta, researchers surveyed around 5000 Canadian fifth grade students and their parents as part of the Children's Lifestyle and School-Performance Study.

Information regarding dietary intake, height, and weight were recorded and the Diet Quality Index-International (DQI-I) was used to summarize overall diet quality. The DQI-I score ranges from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating better diet quality. Less healthful dietary components included saturated fat and salt, while healthy foods were classified by fruits, vegetables, grains, dietary fiber, protein, calcium and moderate fat intake.

A standardized literacy assessment was administered to the children. Multilevel regression methods were used to examine the association between indicators of diet quality and academic performance.

Students with an increased fruit and vegetable intake and less caloric intake from fat were significantly less likely to fail the literacy assessment. Relative to students in the group with the lowest DQI-I scores, students in the group with the best scores were 41 % less likely to fail the literacy assessment.

“We demonstrated that above and beyond socioeconomic factors, diet quality is important to academic performance,” the authors conclude. “These findings support the broader implementation and investment in effective school nutrition programs that have the potential to improve student’s diet quality, academic performance, and, over the long term, their health.”

Source: Blackwell Publishing

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