

Healthy diets linked to better mental health and wellbeing

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A healthy diet was linked to better mental health and wellbeing, highlighting the need for more strategies to warn families off junk food, according to a new study.

The research, led by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*, found that diets high in inflammatory foods were associated with poorer mental wellbeing in children aged 11 to 12 years, with similar effects observed in their parents.

Highly processed foods, including those high in sugar or salt, are known to cause inflammation and negatively affect [physical health](#). But this study has also found a link between such diets, and an inflammatory blood marker called GlycA and mental wellbeing.

The researchers examined the association between inflammatory diets and mental wellbeing in more than 1700 Australian 11- to 12-year-olds and their parents, taking part in the Child Health Checkpoint Study.

MCRI's Dr. Kate Lycett said there was a need to introduce new public policy measures such as further restrictions on [junk food](#) advertising and increasing taxes on processed foods high in fat and sugar.

Dr. Lycett said the research also highlighted the benefits associated with a low inflammatory [diet](#), high in fruit, vegetables and wholegrains, beyond the positive impacts to physical health.

"This research demonstrates yet another compelling reason to urgently reduce inflammatory diets early in life. High sugar and salt diets and poor mental health are two pressing societal concerns," she said.

"This type of study gives us a good idea about what might be happening, but to really test if it's accurate, we need to conduct intervention trials at the population level. That would establish causation, inform community level policies to reduce inflammatory diets and benefit mental wellbeing."

MCRI GenV Scientific Director, Professor Melissa Wake, said that large-scale long-term studies such as GenV would enable such intervention trials.

"Large research projects like GenV will speed up answers to the major issues facing children and adults, today and for their futures," she said. "For example, GenV could follow families over a long period of time to establish causation between early life diet and later mental health and [wellbeing](#), it could provide our [policy-makers](#) with the evidence they need to make meaningful, early interventions to improve [health](#) outcomes for children and adults.

"GenV is creating large, parallel whole-of-state child and parent cohorts which for the first time will give policymakers the breadth and depth of data needed to change policy now, as well as provide the policy solutions for the future," she said.

More information: Kate M. Lycett et al, Does an inflammatory diet affect mental well-being in late childhood and mid-life? A cross-sectional study, *British Journal of Nutrition* (2021). [DOI: 10.1017/S0007114521001616](#)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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