



Colorado Food Bank Association Digest

“Building a well nourished Colorado through education, advocacy and resource development”

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Perspective - The Relationship between Nutrition and Performance at School

Conventional wisdom says that nutrient deficiency is somehow connected to poor academic performance. But why is this so? Quite simply, the human brain needs a large number of nutrients, including vitamins, minerals and amino acids to produce neurotransmitters and other important brain compounds. A lack of nutrients can result in chemical abnormalities and missed connections. Brain science is demonstrating that it doesn't take much of a nutrition deficit to have a major effect. Brain chemistry can change as a result of a lack of a single nutrient, giving rise not only to diminished mental acuity, but also to mental/emotional disturbances and behavioral disorders such as hyperactivity, Attention Deficit Disorder, anxiety, depression, eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia), drug and alcohol addiction, autism and violence.

If lack of nutrients can have these results, then can the plastic brain repair itself as a result of improved nutrition. The answer appears to be a resounding “yes.” As a result of changes in school diet in the early 1980s in New York City schools, the average performance of New York schools rose from the 41st percentile to the 51st percentile – a large gain that statistically could have no other explanation. A more recent study from England of children with attention deficit disorder demonstrated the salutary effects of imposing a regular, nutritious diet. For a period of three to four weeks, the children were on a very restricted diet, generally consisting of: turkey, lamb, rice, potato, banana, pear, various vegetables, bottled water, sunflower oil and milk-free margarine.

The results were fairly astonishing. 76% of parents reported a worthwhile improvement in behavior. The rest reported no change. Equally interesting, for the children who improved, the subsequent introduction of food additives into the diet resulted in a deterioration in behavior for 70% of the participants.

All this goes to show that it's not only true that you are what you eat, but that kids' performance in school is likely to follow the type of food they eat. If they eat well, they'll do well. If they eat junk food, they're likely to get junk grades. **This is why support is needed for food banks to provide the food families need!**

Local Perspective - Community Food Share, Boulder, Longmont

“I would like to thank you very much for the food I get. I wish I could send you the \$6 (Elder Share annual fee), but I don't have that much money and my social security check is only \$731 a month and it doesn't go far.” Elder Share Member

The definition of Food Security is, “The assured access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life.” While of course our first thought may be of the importance of a nutritious diet for developing children, America's Second Harvest food banks in Colorado address the health needs of other at risk groups, such as the low-income elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

Community Food Share's Elder Share program, in existence for twenty years, strives to ensure that our seniors remain healthy and independent as long as possible. This program distributes groceries twice a week to approximately 1,000 low-income seniors at 10 congregate sites throughout Boulder and Broomfield counties, such as senior centers. For those Elder Share Members who are homebound, food is delivered to them directly.

Community Food Share also distributes food through partner agencies that help those with chronic illnesses, such as the Mental Health Center of Boulder County, the Boulder County AIDS Project and There with Care, an agency that addresses the food needs of those receiving end of life care. The goal of the Colorado Food Bank Association is a food secure Colorado. Clearly, there is a direct relationship between an adequate, nutritious diet and the good health of all of our citizens.



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