

Healthy diet means better school performance

Reuters

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) -- Kids who eat better perform better in school, a new study of Nova Scotian fifth-graders confirms.

Students who ate an adequate amount of fruit, vegetables, protein, fiber and other components of a healthy diet were significantly less likely to fail a literacy test, Dr. Paul J. Veugelers of the University of Alberta in Edmonton and colleagues found.

While a healthy diet is generally assumed to be important for good school performance, there has actually been little research on this topic, Veugelers and his colleagues note. To investigate, they looked at 4,589 fifth-graders participating in the Children's Lifestyle and School-performance Study, 875 (19.1 percent) of whom had failed an elementary literacy assessment.

The better a student's eating habits based on several measures of diet quality, including adequacy and variety, the less likely he or she was to have failed the test, the researchers found, even after they adjusted the data for the effects of parental income and education, school, and sex. Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, and getting fewer calories from fat, was also associated with a lower risk of failing the test.

To date, Veugelers and his team say, most research on diet and school performance has focused on the importance of eating breakfast, as well as the ill effects of hunger and malnutrition.

"This study extends current knowledge in this area by demonstrating the independent importance of overall diet quality to academic performance," the researchers conclude.

"The consistency of this association across various indicators of diet quality gives emphasis to the importance of children's nutrition not only at breakfast but throughout the day."

SOURCE: Journal of School Health, April 2008.



CREDIT: Sean Gallup/Getty Images
Children make island scenes out of fruit and vegetables. Kids who eat better perform better in school, a new study in Nova Scotia fifth-graders confirms.