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What Effects Does Nutrition Have On Mental Health

So what is Mental Health really all about? The following report includes some fascinating information about Mental Health--info you can use, not just the old stuff they used to tell you.

It has been an enduring belief that nutrition plays a significant role in the state of mental health of an individual. But is this true or not?

Recent as well as previous researches have proven that nutrition (or the lack of it) does have effects on how a person's brain functions, his moods and his behaviors.

Say for example, a person who has skipped a meal is observably weak, out of focus and irritable. This case worsens when extended to a certain period of time when the person becomes severely moody and indifferent to the demands of his environment thus showing decreased speed in reaction time.

These behaviors occur due to the lack of nutrition supply to the brain. The brain requires high energy and nutrient supply. It comprises, in fact, 20% to 30% of all the energy consumption of the body during rest periods. Thus, any change in diet or nutrition level of the body directly reflects in the mental functioning.

Chronic energy deprivation, such as the case of malnourished people, results to the eventual shutting down of the body by decreasing its activities and redirecting all its energy sources towards the systems that require higher energy supply. This results to altered levels of activities, changes in hormonal levels, lessened immune system efficiency and transport of nutrients and oxygen to certain body parts, all of which could directly or indirectly influence mental health. People with extremely low nutrition are more likely to become sad, depressed and emotional as compared with those who have adequate nutrition.

I trust that what you've read so far has been informative. The following section should go a long way toward clearing up any uncertainty that may remain.

Newborn babies and fetuses are also susceptible to brain damage if they are subjected to lack of necessary nutrition. The type and degree of damage is dependent on the severity of malnutrition. Also, malnutrition among babies has proven to produce low level of intelligence, cognitive defects as well as functional abnormalities.

Protein, carbohydrates, lipids and vitamins all have individual effects on the brain. Lack of supply of these necessary nutrients result to alterations in the activities of the neurotransmitters, a chemical component in the brain that transmit one nerve impulse from one nerve cell to another. Malfunctioning of the transmitters could influence a person's mood, thinking and even sleep patterns. Additionally, deficient levels of nutrition may result to nerve cell damage that could disrupt cognitive and mental functions.

Neurotransmitters are partly made of amino acids, the building block of protein. Tryptophan for example, makes up the neurotransmitter serotonin. If the required amino acid is lacking, the functions of the neurotransmitter could not be executed affecting the normal functioning of the brain. In case of deficient protein consumption and failure to supply the necessary amino acid to make serotonin, the body would experience low mood and perhaps, aggression. On the other hand, diseases that could cause the build up of certain amino acids could lead to brain damage thus affecting the mental health of an individual.

Mood regulation could also be associated with the sufficient intake of dietary fats. Some studies have yielded inconclusive results on the correlation between serotonin level and intake of omega-3 fatty acids, a certain type of fat found only in white fish to stress and symptoms of bipolar disorder (a mood disorder having the representations of both mania and depression).

Directly or indirectly, nutrition has an effect on mental health. Changes in the nutritional intake of a person could lead to alterations in the mental health and vice versa.

Knowing enough about Mental Health to make solid, informed choices cuts down on the fear factor. If you apply what you've just learned about Mental Health, you should have nothing to worry about.

About the Author

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