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JOEL FUHRMAN, MD

The effects of soda on children's behavior

The standard American diet, chock full of soda and other sugary drinks, fast foods, and other low-nutrient foods, can have a major impact on the health and lives of our children.

Rising rates of childhood obesity driven by this way of eating have received much attention; however, low-nutrient foods are still having negative effects on the physical and mental health of children who are not overweight.

Children are not immune to the damaging health effects of the standard American diet, which can set them up for a lifetime of poor health ranging from heart disease to behavior problems and lower cognitive performance.

On average, U.S. children and teens consume over 200 calories a day from soda and other sugary drinks, and it is estimated that about 14 percent of their calories come from fast food. As a result of the poor diets of American children,

more than one-third of normal-weight teenagers (and about half of overweight teenagers) have at least one diet-related risk factor for heart disease.

These dietary patterns have the potential to dramatically affect not only public health but the productivity of our future adult population; studies have implicated poor diet in limiting intelligence and academic performance, and also has drawn parallels between consumption of sweets during childhood and violence in adulthood.

A study on soda consumption found an increase in behavior and attention problems in five-year-old children (as assessed by their mothers) with increasing daily consumption of soda.

Forty-three percent of the five-year-olds in the study drank soda at least once a day. The authors adjusted their results for potential confounding factors that might affect behavior, such as hours of tele-

vision and a stressful home environment, and still found a significant association between soda consumption and aggression, withdrawn behavior and poor attention.

They proposed that caffeine and/or fluctuations in blood sugar might be responsible for the association between soda and behavior problems. Blood glucose levels do affect the workings of the brain, and habitual high sugar intake has been shown to impair cognitive function.

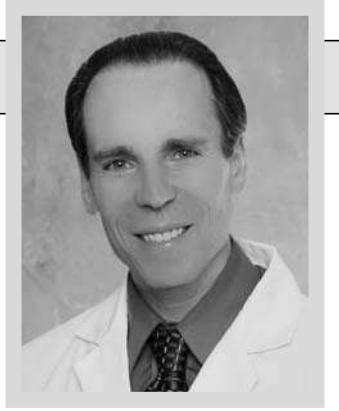
Several previous studies on high school students have also associated soda consumption with aggressive behavior, as well as depression and self-harm. Plus, higher sugar sweetened beverage consumption is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancers.

In addition to soda, higher fast food consumption in fifth grade (four or more times per week) has been associated with poorer academic progress in

math, reading and science between fifth grade and eighth grade. Children who ate fast food one to three times per week—a common level of intake—compared to those who ate no fast food had lower scores in math. These results suggest that children eating fast food frequently could slow their academic progress.

The food habits children develop in their early years have a substantial impact on their physical health and mental well-being throughout the rest of our lives.

Parents need to know this information, so that they can help their children to live



healthfully, maintain a positive mindset and reach their full cognitive potential.

Dr. Fuhrman is a New York Times best-selling author and board certified family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine.

Visit his website at DrFuhrman.com, or submit questions and comments to newsquestions@drfuhrman.com.

Soups On to discuss reality of reality

On Monday, Sept. 21, at 6:30 p.m., everyone is invited to 875 Seventh St. in Florence to join a group with diverse spiritual paths who enjoy discussing life's big questions.

This week the subject will be "Is reality one?"

Abdu'l-Baha says, "...every individual member of humankind is exhorted and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and

blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself. Inasmuch as the fundamental reality is one, all religions and nations of the world will become one through investigation of reality."

The evening will begin with bowls of navy bean soup, fruit, homemade warm bread and vegetables, followed by the evening's topic until 8:30 p.m.

The gathering will end with prayers for the requests left in the Prayer Pole in the garden of the Florence Playhouse and those shared by the group.

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