New Aid for Students Who Struggle to Stay Focused and Improve Their Grades

As a classroom teacher I frequently see the signs and symptoms of food allergies among many of my students. They are often the reluctant or resistant learners whose attention strays, leading to confusion even about simple concepts. (Yet it is also common for these youngsters to grasp more difficult course content.) They often arrive late, take frequent bathroom breaks, and are variously anxious to leave early or are so engrossed in a task that they forget the time completely.

The link between what students eat and how they feel...

Although some of these children enjoy learning, most struggle with the structure, schedules, and discipline of the classroom. Grades suffer as a result of these learning, attention, and behavior problems but most do manage to achieve minimally passing grades. Sadly, some fall far behind and become deeply discouraged despite an obvious ability to master their lessons.

Discussions of my own experiences with food allergies has led a few of my struggling students to eliminate one or two of the most commonly allergenic foods - gluten and/or dairy products. They invariably report improvements to their complexions and sleep patterns, while I observe significant improvements in their academic performance.

How to test to pinpoint foods affecting student performance

Such a hit-and-miss approach to learning problems driven by food allergies is both inefficient and unnecessarily complicated. Simple, available blood tests not only identify the specific foods that should be avoided, they also suggest (through negative results) those that may be safe to eat.

World renowned biochemist and researcher, Dr. Paul Shattock said: "We suspect "allergies" as responsible for a lot of unusual events (weird seizures for a start). The testing is a bit suspect as we are not normally talking about classic IgE reactions.

We are tending to suggest people use the IgG testing such as is done at Immuno Laboratories as being the nearest to actuality. However, we usually suggest waiting until gluten and casein are removed as these may often act as a co-factor. It seems to us that you often need a double hit. The gluten or casein pull back the hammer and cock it whereas the actual allergen pulls the trigger. So, without the gluten and casein many problems of allergic origin disappear anyway" (1).

Science begins to unravel the mystery

The obvious question is: how can supposedly healthy foods, such as gluten and dairy, cause problems with learning and maintaining focus? Some research shows that the incomplete digests of these foods result in small amounts of morphine-like substances that dull some regions of the brain (2). Other research demonstrates, among genetically susceptible individuals, that these foods damage the intestinal wall compromising our ability to absorb important minerals such as iron, which are critical to learning and maintaining attention (3). Still other research has shown that, among those with a genetic susceptibility, gluten, a major constituent in almost every American’s diet, causes leakage of undigested and partly digested proteins across the intestinal barrier and into the bloodstream (4). The same substance results in leakage across the blood brain barrier as well (4). This new research implies a pathway by which toxic substances, including opioids, can enter the brain.
Theories aside, we know that 66% to 70% of children with celiac disease have attention deficit disorder (ADD)(5, 6). Although celiac disease afflicts a mere 1% or so of the general population, a similar condition, gluten sensitivity, is found in more than 12% of the general population (7). The rate of ADD may well compromise similar proportions of those with gluten sensitivity.

We also know that a disproportionately large rate of celiac disease and milk protein sensitivity is found among school children with dyslexia (8).

**Food allergy testing may be the missing link to better performance and higher grades**

There should be little doubt that food allergies can seriously interfere with a student's performance at school. Timely testing and the inconvenience of dietary exclusions seems a small price to pay for helping children to avoid or halt the heartache that often accompanies poor school performance.

**Sources:**

1. Shattock, P. personal communication. printed with permission.


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