IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN DIET CRIME AND DELINQUENCY?

As I see it by John Appleton

I have a book in my bookcase titled ‘Diet Crime and Delinquency’. It’s a fascinating account of the strong links between what we eat (or don’t eat) and the way we behave. Nutritional deficiencies and imbalances can impair brain function and set the stage for criminal behaviour say scientists who have conducted studies that confirm the links.

Forget tougher punishments and hiring more police; research is showing that a solution to crime and violence could be found on the dinner plate. These findings are not new and what surprises me is that there is little interest in this approach at Government level. I have previously suggested that we conduct studies in our prisons and indeed at schools where behavioural problems are of concern. For some reason our politicians remain locked into a system which focuses on throwing more and more money at the problem while refusing to acknowledge the role of nutrition.

Back in the 70’s Bill Walsh a scientist from Argonne National Laboratory in the U.S. studied mineral levels in the hair of 24 pairs of brothers. In each case one brother was ‘good’ and the other a ‘boy from hell’. The results stunned him. The ‘good’ boys had normal mineral levels but the delinquents had two distinctive patterns. One group had very high copper and very low zinc, sodium and potassium and the other group had very low zinc and copper and very high sodium and potassium. Interestingly the troublemakers had high lead and cadmium levels – 3 times higher than their well-behaved brothers. Alexander Schauss author of ‘Diet Crime and Delinquency’ says that environmental exposure to lead is 500 times that experienced by 16th century man.

Walsh decided to extend his research to adults and he found exactly that same patterns in 192 adults half of which were incarcerated criminals and half law abiding adults. He discovered behavioural traits that matched each mineral pattern. People with the very high copper and low zinc would repeatedly lose their temper (violent reaction) and later feel remorse. The people with the low copper and low zinc and high sodium and potassium never had a good day. Walsh found them to be mean and cruel, oppositionally defiant and they had no remorse.

It turned out that the violent kids were found to have been born with a metal metabolism disorder and as a result they had an inability process minerals. Metallothionein is a protein needed for the absorption of zinc and the violent kids have poor Metallothionein in the gut. Subsequently Dr Walsh analysed 207 patients with behavioural disorders who were treated at the Pfeiffer Treatment centre in Illinois. 92% of assaultive patients who followed their prescribed diet and took supplements improved and 58% completely eliminated this type of behaviour.
A sociology professor Stephen Schoenthaler at California State University also found powerful links between nutrients and behaviour. Originally a skeptic, Shoenthaler concludes that after 20 years of studies he’s a believer; nutrition has a huge role to play.

One study of juvenile delinquents and adult criminals in five U.S. states found that the offenders with the worst behaviour consumed the least Vitamins and Minerals. In California prisons convicts with up to 4 nutritional deficiencies were 50% more likely to be involved in serious violent incidents and those with 5-9 nutritional deficiencies were 90% more likely to be involved in such incidents.

In the 80’s Schoenthaler was involved with a study that changed the nutritional content of school lunch served to 1.1 million New York students. In just one year a more wholesome diet led to a 16% increase in academic performance and a 41% decrease in learning disabled children. I wonder what an optimal diet might have achieved. There are many studies like this in several countries.

Appleton Central Alternative High School in the town of Appleton Wisconsin opened its doors in 1996 to give individualised attention to students who were struggling in the conventional system. The school is now famous for what was achieved after the introduction of a wellness programme. Prior to this the only food and beverages available at school were soft drinks chips and snacks from vending machines. Students displayed a lack of concentration, they often interrupted their teachers and peers, listened poorly, visited each other during class, daydreamed and were off task. Students lost their tempers, stormed out of the classroom, used profane language and made inappropriate comments. They also complained about being tired and ill.

After the introduction of the wellness programme which was based on healthy food and exercise, disruptive behaviour and health complaints diminished substantially. Teacher Mary Bruyette said she saw changes “overnight”. She noticed a considerable decrease in impulsive behaviours, such as the use of foul language and the students simply felt better about themselves. The programme was incredibly successful.

For me the most interesting part of this programme was another experiment when they had a ‘Junk Food’ Day. No prizes for guessing what happened. Before Junk Food Day, 70% of students said yes to having felt “happy and nice” after school. After Junk Food Day, only 13% responded yes. A total of 76% of students said they slept well before Junk Food Day, compared to 29% after. Only 10% of the students had a stomach-ache before and 50%.

As to why it’s not front page news – I guess it’s the same reason why patients with life threatening illnesses continue to be refused treatment with Vitamin C. An admission that such simple solutions exist could change the way that medicine is practised and that may not be a situation that is welcomed by the medical ‘establishment’.

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