

ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

Children's System Advisory Committee

Nutrition and Physical Activity

ISSUE BRIEF

Submitted by Ron Sipress, May 2006

Issue	Genetics and environment are important factors in brain development. Nutrition and physical activity are vital environmental factors that influence the health of the brain. What is put into children's bodies, and the exercise they get, have dramatic effects on- children's thoughts, feelings and actions. In addition to promoting healthy physical and emotional development, nutrition and physical activity contribute to effective mental health services and to children's readiness to learn. For these reasons, nutrition and physical activity choices need to be more fully addressed in mental health services.
Background	<p>A combination of changes in social, cultural, economic, and physical environments has led to concerning decreases in children's patterns of healthy eating and physical activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing methods of farming have introduced higher levels of synthetic chemicals and modified fats into our diet. There are over 350 different pesticides used in conventional farming and at least 4,500 different chemical compounds used as additives in commercially processed foods. Processed foods tend to be higher in calories, fat, salt, sugar and/or chemicals and some are nutritionally inferior to less processed whole foods.• With such a wide variety of available and advertised foods, it is becoming more difficult to ensure that children are provided healthy choices in their diet. There is also growing concern about the interaction between medications, and dietary intake.• Many children and adults are less physically active than previous generations, in part because of increases in mechanized work and household activities, reliance on motor-driven rather than pedestrian transportation, more sitting time on the job, fewer physical education offerings in schools, and increased use of electronic media and screen time during work and leisure activities. With so many sedentary activities available, it is harder to ensure that children are provided with enough physical activity opportunities to promote their physical and mental health.
Policy Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further research into the interaction between nutrition, nutritional supplements, medications, physical activity and children's mental health is needed[T1].• Treatment implications of this research need to be considered and applied.• Nutritional and physical activity issues fully involve considerations, policies, practices and principles of family-driven care, physical health and cultural competency.
Recommendation / Rationale	<p>The committee recommends that AMH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the importance of nutrition and physical activity in mental health[T2].• Promote integration of mental health with physical health care and public health;• Pursue opportunities to encourage providers to offer research-based education to clients and family members regarding nutrition and physical activity,• Pursue opportunities to encourage providers to listen to and incorporate dietary, nutritional and physical activity wishes of parents and clients;• Pursue training and workforce development on the interaction of nutrition, physical activity and mental health and the importance of family choice in nutritional planning• Recommend that evidence-based nutrition and physical activity policies, standards and practices be integrated into both physical and mental health treatment programs• Link with other state agencies (such as Dept. of Education and Dept. of Public Health) to establish more consistent nutritional and physical activity approaches across systems.