

[IMAGE]

Low-Fat Diet Won't Hinder Childhood Growth

nbsp; If you think your children are "too young" to be influenced by the foods they eat (or don't eat), think again. The 1993 Pathobiological Determinants of Atherosclerosis in Youth Study found that nearly half of all Americans 15-19 years old have fatty streaks in their coronary arteries, increasing to 75% by age 35. Modification of dietary fat intake in early childhood has been suggested to reduce later-life risk of coronary artery disease, but this suggestion has been tempered by concerns over the possible negative affects on growth and neurological development.

To address this concern, a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* evaluated how "parental counseling aimed at keeping children's diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol influences neurodevelopment during the first five years of life." The parents of 540 children received individualized counseling suggesting that children's fat intake be limited to 30-35% of daily energy (with equal amounts of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and saturated fat), and cholesterol intake limited to less than 200 mg per day. A second group of parents (with 522 total children) served as controls, receiving standard health education with no specific advice about limiting dietary fat.

Data were gathered from seven months until five years of age; results showed that children in the intervention group received a diet lower in total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol and had blood cholesterol levels 3-5% lower than children in the control group. Additionally, neurological development, assessed by tests of speech and language skills, gross motor functioning and perception, and visual motor skills, was "at least as good" in children receiving dietary intervention vs. children in the control group.

Plant the seeds for your children's health by encouraging a balanced diet, especially one high in vitamins and minerals and low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

Reference:

Rask-Nissila L, Jokinen E, Terho P, et al. Neurological development of 5-year-old children receiving a low-saturated fat, low-cholesterol diet since infancy. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Aug. 23/30 2000: Vol. 284, No. 8, pp993-1000.

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