

FOOD & MENTAL HEALTH

BROKEN BRAINS
BROKEN SYSTEMS

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NEW PATH FORWARD FOR MENTAL HEALTH STARTS WITH FOOD

The data is in: nourishing the brain through better food may be one of the most powerful steps we can take to support attention, learning, behavior, and emotional resilience.

In 2009, when I published *The UltraMind Solution*, the idea that food could drive mental illness, behavior, and cognition was still fringe.

Most psychiatrists weren't asking what their patients ate. Parents weren't being told that ADHD, anxiety, or learning problems might have roots in blood sugar, nutrient deficiencies, or chronic inflammation. Brain issues were treated as brain-only problems.

**But I Kept
Seeing Something
I Could Not Ignore:**

When people
changed their
food, their brains
changed, too.

One of my early patients was a 12-year-old boy with severe ADHD—disruptive, impulsive, unable to focus, and struggling in school. We didn't start with stimulants. We started with his fork.

- **We removed processed and junk foods**
- **We added a real-food diet rich in protein, healthy fats, and plants**
- **We corrected deficiencies in omega-3 fats, magnesium, zinc, and B vitamins**

Within two months, his behavior transformed. Even his handwriting changed—from scattered and chaotic to neat and controlled.

That wasn't a miracle. It was biology.

Since then, the science has finally started to catch up.



METABOLIC PSYCHIATRY: THE BRAIN ISN'T SEPARATE FROM THE BODY

Entire departments at Harvard, Stanford, and other leading institutions now study “metabolic psychiatry”—the intersection of:

- Diet
- Metabolism
- Inflammation
- Mental health

The core idea is simple, but radical in psychiatry:

The brain is an energy-hungry organ that depends on metabolic health. When metabolism breaks—through insulin resistance, obesity, inflammation, micronutrient deficiencies—the brain breaks, too:

- Mitochondria (our cellular energy factories) falter
- Neurotransmitter production suffers
- Immune responses inside the brain go haywire
- Mood, focus, memory, and impulse control deteriorate

Mental illness may not kill as fast as a heart attack, but it steals more years of life from disability and lost productivity than heart disease, diabetes, or cancer—because it hits earlier and lingers longer.



Major medical journals, including *The Lancet Psychiatry*, now recognize nutrition as a key pillar of mental health. Studies have shown:

- People with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia often have low antioxidant levels (i.e., they eat few fruits and vegetables)
- Deficiencies in omega-3s, B vitamins, magnesium, iron, zinc, iodine, vitamin E, and others impair brain function and neurotransmitter balance
- Chronic inflammation from ultra-processed, sugar-heavy “Frankenfoods” directly harms brain health

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: WE'RE STARVING KIDS' BRAINS

It's no coincidence that as school lunches, snacks, and home diets have become more ultra-processed, our academic performance has fallen off a cliff.

- The U.S. ranks 37th in math globally
- 1 in 6 children has a neurodevelopmental disorder
- More than 1 in 10 kids has ADHD
- Brain development is worst in the poorest kids, whose diets are also the worst. Their brain volumes are ~10% smaller, and IQs average 7 points lower than developmental norms.

We call it an “achievement gap,” as if it were purely about teachers, curriculum, or motivation.

But the CDC's 2014 report
“Health and Academic
Achievement” spelled it out:
Poor nutrition is linked
to lower test scores
and grades.



Kids with low intake of real food and high intake of junk have:

- Reduced alertness and attention
- Weaker working memory
- Poorer visual processing and problem-solving
- Higher absenteeism and tardiness

And yes, behavioral chaos.

How can we expect kids to learn when:

- The average American child consumes 34 teaspoons of sugar a day
- Their breakfasts are often dessert (cereal, muffins, pancakes, sugary drinks)

- Their brains are missing essential nutrients and drowning in blood sugar spikes and crashes

We aren't just failing to educate our kids. We're biochemically sabotaging their ability to be educated.

Special education enrollment is surging. In San Diego Unified, special ed students increased by nearly 10% in one year, even as overall enrollment fell. The cost burden is exploding.

Is every learning difference caused by food? Of course not.

But we can't ignore that most of the brain chemistry we try to “treat” with pills is built from nutrients we're not providing.

BRAIN INFLAMMATION: WHEN YOUR “ADULT IN THE ROOM” SHUTS DOWN

Poor diet doesn't just make kids hyper and adults tired.

It fuels chronic brain inflammation, which alters:

- How we think
- How we feel
- How we act

When the brain is inflamed:

- The prefrontal cortex (PFC)—our rational “CEO”—goes offline
- The amygdala—our emotional “smoke alarm”—takes over



An inflamed brain is like a brain stuck in childhood:

- Impulsive
- Reactive
- Incapable of delaying gratification
- Prone to anger, anxiety, and emotional outbursts

This isn't a character flaw.

It's a physiological state.

And it's being induced at scale by ultra-processed foods, sugar spikes, nutrient gaps, and inflammatory fats.

FROM CAFETERIA TO CELL BLOCK: FOOD, VIOLENCE, AND CRIME



If this sounds exaggerated, consider what happens when we change food in the most extreme environments—prisons and juvenile detention centers.

Multiple randomized controlled trials have found that improving nutrition can dramatically reduce violent behavior:

- In one double-blind study of adult prisoners, nutritional supplements (omega-3s, vitamins, minerals) cut violent offenses by 37%

- A Dutch prison study found a 47% reduction in violent incidents with supplementation—and a 61% reduction when drug offenders were excluded

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- A Dutch prison study found a 47% reduction in violent incidents with supplementation—and a 61% reduction when drug offenders were excluded
- In violent juveniles, adding vitamin and mineral supplements slashed violent acts by 91% (Kids who improved their diet reduced violent behavior by ~80%; those who didn't showed no change)
- **In another study of ~3,000 incarcerated youth, replacing junk snacks with healthier options and drastically reducing sugar and refined carbs led to:**

21% fewer antisocial incidents

25% fewer assaults

75% less use of restraints

100% reduction in suicides

Read that last line again: suicides dropped to zero in that facility during the intervention.

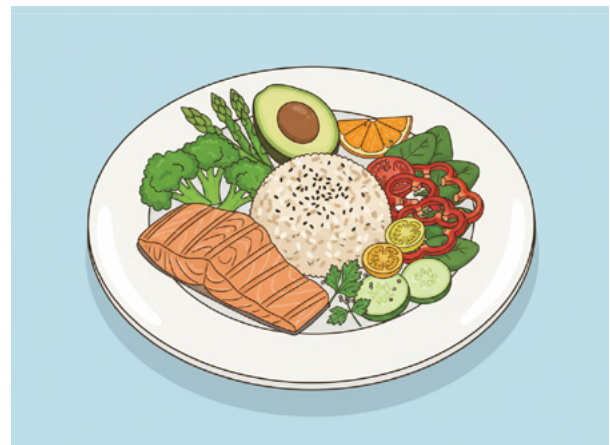
One of the study authors remarked that diet was a better predictor of future violence than past violent behavior or a psychopathic diagnosis.

Does that mean food is the sole cause of crime or violence? Obviously not.

But it does suggest that we're underestimating a massive lever for:

- Reducing aggression
- Improving impulse control
- And making communities safer

I once received a letter from a man in prison for violent crimes. He had read one of my books, changed his diet in prison, and wrote to say he realized his whole life of violence had been fueled by the way he'd been eating. Once he changed his food, his mind changed—and so did his behavior.



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So Why Aren't We Talking About This?

We're raising the first generation that will live sicker and die younger than their parents. That's because we're:

- Feeding kids diets that hijack their brains
- Sending them into classrooms expecting them to learn
- Punishing them when they can't sit still or self-regulate
- Medicating them instead of nourishing
- And then acting as if this is a mysterious epidemic no one can explain

Our prisons are overflowing.

Our schools are overwhelmed.

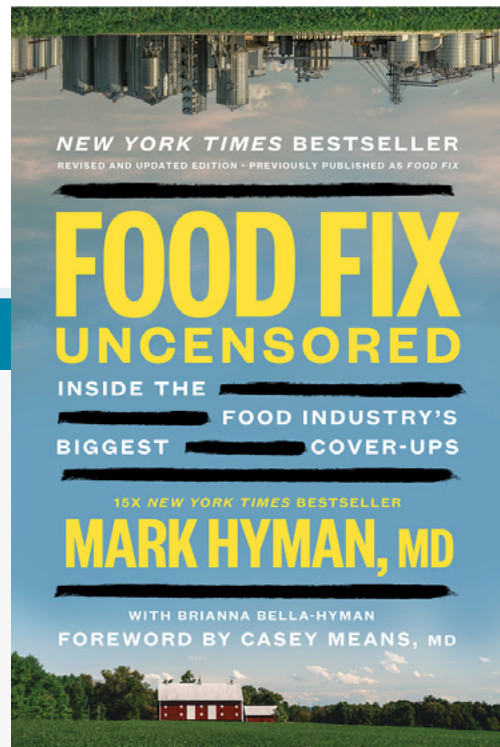
Our mental health system is collapsing under demand.

And still, almost no one with power is standing up and saying the most obvious thing:

It's the food.

Want to go deeper into how food is driving our mental health, behavior, learning, and social crises—and what we can do about it?

You'll find the full story, the data, and the solutions in **Food Fix Uncensored**, coming February 10. It maps the science, the policy failures, and the real-world interventions—from classrooms to prisons—that show how fixing our food could help heal our brains, our kids, and our communities.



[Pre-order Today!](#)