

How Money Helps to Build Brain Power

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We know that children who grow up poor are much more at risk for problems later on, from mental and physical health issues to lower education levels and less income as adults. It's one of the clearest and most worrying results in psychology. Among other things, children from low-income families are more likely to develop anxiety and depression. More recently, we've also discovered that low income is associated with physical changes in brain development. For example, children from low-income families tend to develop a smaller hippocampus—a part of the brain that is important for learning and memory.

The big question is how we could fix this. A [new paper](#) published in the journal *Nature Communications*—by Katie McLaughlin and David Weissman at Harvard and their colleagues—suggests that money can make a difference and so can certain social policies.

Low income is associated with many factors: the place you live, how much social support you can count on and the stresses you experience. In particular, low-income families face more stress, and we know that stress has important effects on brain development. But development is complicated; different social and physical and neurological changes all interact, so it's hard to know exactly how you could relieve that stress. All this complexity might make it hard to design effective interventions.

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