



Activity #5

***Appropriate for 5th grade and above- can be adapted for younger audiences.**

What Are Hunger's Consequences?

Description:

Students will identify and discuss the many health and behavioral impacts of hunger.

Objectives:

This activity will increase awareness of the impact of hunger and identify specific health and behavioral consequences of hunger and low-food security.

Time:

10-15 minutes

Materials:

- Smart board, white board, or flipchart with markers
- List of some of the health and behavioral consequences of hunger
(*See list below*)

Activity Directions:

- Make two columns on the chalkboard or flip-chart and label one column "health" and the other "behavior".
- Ask students to consider the health and behavioral consequences of hunger. If students are having difficulty identifying any, consider offering a few examples from the list below.

- At the end of the exercise, compare the class list with the list below. Share any of the consequences that did not come up in the discussion.

Health Consequences: ¹

- Children who are hungry often experience headaches, fatigue, frequent colds, and other illnesses that may cause them to be less physically active.
- Undernourished pregnant women tend to have low birth weight babies. Low birth weight babies suffer from more physical illness, as well as impaired growth and development. Undernourished infants are at greater risk of dying within their first year of life.
- Chronic hunger in adults weakens bones and muscles, increases the risk of illness, worsens existing health problems, and contributes to depression and lack of energy.
- Iron deficiency anemia, a form of malnutrition affecting nearly 25% of poor children in the nation, is associated with impaired cognitive development. Anemia influences attention span and memory. This pervasive deficiency is now known to have a severe impact on cognitive development.
- Poor maternal and infant nutrition affect an infant's birth weight, cognitive development, immune system and overall health.
- Children and pregnant women have relatively high nutrient needs for growth and development. Therefore, they are often the first to show signs of nutrient deficiencies.
- Limited access to fresh produce and other healthy foods can lead to obesity and other serious health issues like hypertension and diabetes. [Hunger and Obesity- New York Times Article 2010](#)

¹ Cook J.T., Frank D.A. Food Security, Poverty, and Human Development in the United States. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. 2008 (Online Early Articles). doi:10.1196/annals.1425.001, <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1196/annals.1425.001?cookieSet=1>.

Jyoti D.F., Frongillo E.A., Jones S.J. Food Insecurity Affects School Children's Academic Performance, Weight Gain, and Social Skills. *J Nutr*, 2005 Dec; 135: 2831-2839.

Behavioral Consequences²

- Children who are hungry may be less attentive, independent, and curious. Many hungry children have difficulty concentrating; therefore their reading ability and verbal and motor skills suffer.
- Short-term nutritional deficiencies affect children's ability to concentrate and perform complex tasks.
- Hunger in adults produces nervousness, irritability, and difficulty in concentration.
- Hunger can have a devastating emotional impact; it may diminish self-confidence and self-esteem. In a culture that encourages self-reliance, individuals who need food assistance may hesitate to seek help. They may experience feelings of shame or embarrassment due to circumstances that are out of their control.

Discussion Questions

- Are you surprised by any of these consequences to hunger? If so, why?
- What are some ways that these consequences could impact a community, school, or workplace? (*Examples include: high health care costs, high work and school absenteeism, low-school performance*)
- What are some of the community and government responses to hunger that can help prevent these consequences? (*see Activity-7*)

² Jyoti D.F., Frongillo E.A., Jones S.J. Food Insecurity Affects School Children's Academic Performance, Weight Gain, and Social Skills. *J Nutr*, 2005 Dec; 135: 2831-2839.

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