Early-Life Contributors to Child Well-Being

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “happiness” as a state of well-being and contentment. While “happiness” is typically subjective, relative and varies widely among individuals, happiness can be broadly viewed as the feeling that comes over you when you know life is good and you can’t help but smile. It’s the opposite of sadness. Happiness is a feeling of well-being, joy, or contentment. For example, when people feel successful, safe, or lucky, they feel happy. Therefore, for happiness to occur there has to be a balance between positive experiences and some which are less positive. The title of this volume reflects an umbrella that covers important issues that relate the human body and well-being to nutrition. The *World Happiness Report* is a landmark survey of the state of global happiness and is an annual publication of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The *World Happiness Report* 2018 specifically highlights key variables to support well-being (or happiness), including income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust, and generosity.

We invited John F. Helliwell, one of the editors of the *World Happiness Report* and a member of the Global Happiness Council, to contribute a chapter to this issue. Happiness is related to quality of life, and health-related quality of life has become a major area of research evaluating the impact of illnesses and therapies. The ultimate goal of preventive health care and medicine is to achieve the highest quality of life, which in turn could lead to the sense of happiness.

The connection between the brain and the gastrointestinal tract has been extensively studied, but the existence of a bidirectional microbiota-gut-brain axis has gained

substantial attention in the last decade. The individual microorganisms that live in our body, the microbiota, exert considerable influence on host brain and behavior. Variations in microbiota composition have been linked to neuropsychiatric disorders, including autism, stress, anxiety, and major depressive disorder. That microbiota can influence our well-being is quite an amazing proposition. This interaction is explored in the chapter by Martin G. Codagnone et al.

Feeding and parenting are inextricably linked. The complex bidirectional interactions between parent feeding practices and child eating behavior shape the early feeding environment, which in turn interacts with genetic predispositions to lay the foundation for life-long eating habits and health outcomes. Parent feeding and child (and parent) eating are central to the fabric of family life and are strongly rooted in culture and tradition. Yet, many parents experience stress and anxiety related to this ubiquitous parenting task and perceive their child as a “fussy eater” or a “difficult feeder.” Lynne Allison Daniels describes her research and experience on this topic in the third chapter. Eating is intrinsically linked to good feelings, and it is difficult to believe that a family can be happy if their child has abnormal feeding behaviors.

Finally, Mark D. Holder addresses the newly emerging field of positive psychology which focuses on the positive facets of life, including happiness, life satisfaction, personal strengths, and flourishing. Research in this field has empirically identified many important benefits of enhanced well-being, including improvements in blood pressure, immune competence, longevity, career success,

and satisfaction with personal relationships. Recognizing these benefits has motivated researchers to identify the correlates and causes of well-being to inform them in the development and testing of strategies and interventions to elevate well-being. As positive psychology researchers throughout the world have turned their attention toward facets of food intake, a consensus is emerging that the consumption of healthy foods can enhance well-being in a dose-response fashion. Nevertheless, the readers are reminded that most of the research results described in this

chapter do not fulfill the criteria of optimal clinical studies as it is not possible to do double-blinded studies when one is administering different kinds of food. Therefore, we need to consider the value of this type of research as the best possible way to study the subject, even if it cannot meet the expected rules.

We sincerely hope that this issue will contribute to the happiness of our readers.

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