

# Mental stimulation helps raise IQ scores

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University of the West Indies scientists in Jamaica say mental stimulation through play might improve IQ scores in children with stunted growth.

In developing countries poor nutrition causes growth retardation in one third of children younger than 5 years. Children with stunted growth early in life often have poor school achievement and cognition later in life.

Previously, Susan Walker and colleagues looked at nutritional supplementation and psychosocial stimulation in a group of 129 stunted Jamaican children aged 9-24 months. The stimulation consisted of a visit by a trained community health worker for 1 hour, once a week, for a 2-year period and mothers were taught to play with their children on a daily basis in a way to promote development.

Investigators found that both interventions improved the development of the children.

In the latest study, researchers investigated whether the benefits were sustained when the children reached 17-18 years. They found psychosocial stimulation of children with stunted growth led to beneficial effects in cognitive and educational tests. However, children given a food supplement and no stimulation did not have an improved development at 17-18 years.

The study appears in the online edition of *The Lancet*.

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