Title:

The Price of POVERTY.

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["Poor" all too often means "poor health." But there are ways to break the cycle](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Vakeyia Dulaney, 21, spent her. childhood worrying that she'd be a burden to her family if she got sick. Dulaney, who lives in Arkansas, watched her parents struggle to make ends meet. That meant that the cost of good health often was just too high.

"I can remember certain times, such as when my brother caught the flu or a bad stomach virus, and my parents would try old remedies and over-the-counter medicines before getting another bill by making a trip to the doctor," Dulaney says. "Even though my mother took us to the doctor when things really got bad, the [prescription] medicine was extremely costly, so we settled for over-the-counter and rest."

Dulaney and her siblings didn't develop major health problems because of a lack of medical care, but others did. "My great-grandmother lived for years with dementia, and my family … did not have the financial support to be able to assist," Dulaney says. "Her last years were rough. She suffered from infections, bedsores, and other complications before she died."

[More Have Less](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Young and old alike suffer when forced to choose between paying the monthly bills and treating their illnesses and injuries. The basic poverty level for the mainland United States in 2009 was a yearly income of $22,050 for a family of four. Using a slightly different formula, the U.S. Census Bureau found that nearly one in six Americans live in poverty. That includes 18 percent of people younger than 18.

Another way to chart poverty is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a government program that helps the poor buy food. The number of people who use SNAP, also known as food stamps, has climbed sharply in the past two years. About one in eight Americans and nearly one in four children get their meals thanks to SNAP, according to a study by The New York Times.

[Poverty and the Body](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Many who live in poverty have a hard time staying healthy. Kids and teens in wealthy families are six times as likely to be in good health as their poorer peers, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (See "Less Money, More Problems.")

Obesity and diabetes are especially common in poor kids and teens. That's because they have limited access to healthy foods and exercise. In fact, nearly 20 percent of teens living in poverty get fewer than 60 minutes of exercise per week, the UCLA Health Center for Policy Research found.

Amy Rosado, now 24 years old, can relate. She grew up in the Bronx, a part of New York City that was recently named the unhealthiest place in New York state. Her rough community was not an ideal place for kids to get exercise. "The hardest thing for me about where I grew up was not being able to be outside with friends or in the park because the neighborhood I lived in was not safe," she says.

Rosado has also seen many neighbors go without nutritious food. They have "so many other bills and expenses that they usually just buy the food they can afford," she notes. Fresh, healthy foods can be hard to find in low-income

neighborhoods. That's where health officials may find "children who are obese, yet malnourished," says Dr. E. Lisako McKyer of the Child & Adolescent Health Research Lab at Texas A&M University in College Station.

How can that happen? One reason is that high-calorie foods with little nutritional value are usually cheaper than healthier foods. For example, $5 might buy two boxes of macaroni and cheese, a package of hot dogs, instant sugary drinks, and a package of cookies. "Enough to feed a family of five," says McKyer. "The alternative is to spend that same $5 on a single package of chicken breasts. If faced with the need to feed one's family, understandably many will choose to seek the most for their money."

[Poverty and the Mind](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Putting food on the table is only one of the problems that teens in poor families face. Others include family conflict and frequent moves. "I understood that my parents worked hard in order to provide the basic necessities for my siblings and me. Like me, other children who are growing up less fortunate worry about things that children should not have to," says Rosado.

And that stress can put a strain on health. Researchers from Cornell University measured the Cortisol (stress hormone) levels of children living in poverty at age 9 and then 13. At 17, study subjects took memory tests. Results showed that the longer a child lived in poverty, the worse his or her day-to-day memory was. The teens struggled to develop a large vocabulary and had a hard time remembering phone numbers. Their poor memories were linked to living in chronic stress. Other studies have shown that the stress placed on poor teens might lead them to depression or substance abuse problems.

[Turning Things Around](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

There is help for teens battling the obstacles of poverty. For example, California's Healthy Families Program offers low-cost health insurance for kids who might otherwise go without it. Nationwide, SNAP now helps more people than ever before buy healthy foods. Many students get nutritious meals through the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program.

Dulaney received help for 12 years from Children International, which helps children and teens overcome poverty. The program provided medical and dental checkups, so little health problems wouldn't grow into larger ones. It also covered Dulaney's physicals for school sports and offered food baskets and grocery store vouchers for her family during the holidays. "I was also provided with birthday gift cards in order to buy shoes for my birthdays and received jackets during the winter," she adds.

Those small steps made a big difference. Today, Dulaney is a University of Arkansas honors student. She's an example of what can result when less fortunate kids get the help they need to succeed.

[Less Money, More Problems](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Diabetes and obesity are just the tip of the iceberg. Here's what else can happen to young people who grow up in poverty:

[DENTAL PROBLEMS](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Half of impoverished kids and teens have untreated tooth decay, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[SCHOOL PROBLEMS](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Studies have found that the lack of good nutrition affects how well kids do in school.

[EARLY ILLNESS](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

The longer 13-year-olds had lived in poverty, research from Cornell University showed, the lower their bodies' resistance to environmental demands was. Kids who were studied ended up having health problems earlier than is normal for their age.

[HEART DISEASE](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Unhealthy eating habits and lack of exercise can cause this illness.

[STUNTED GROWTH](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Impoverished kids and teens often grow more slowly, according to the Université de Montréal in Canada.

[CHRONIC INFECTION](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

In general, people who live in poverty are exposed to twice as many types of infections, such as hepatitis and herpes, than wealthier people are, research from the University of Michigan shows.

[SUICIDE](http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2afcf563-8294-4a5f-b0e8-c3506147d012%40sessionmgr113&vid=0&hid=116&bdata=JmF1dGh0eXBlPWNvb2tpZSxjdXN0dWlkJmN1c3RpZD1pbmZvaGlvJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#toc)

Poor teens are four times more likely to attempt suicide than teens who are not poor, according to Tufts University.