

The image features a dark silhouette of a person's head in profile, facing right. The interior of the head is filled with a vibrant sunset scene over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water's surface. The sky is a mix of light blue and white, suggesting a clear or slightly hazy day. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

The Effects of Trauma on Your Health

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Healing Internally: The Effects of Trauma on Your Health

Did you know?

Your childhood experiences are linked to chronic health conditions.

Being abused as a child. A violent assault. A sexual assault. A car accident. If you have experienced any of these, it can be affecting your present health.

These are all examples of traumatic events – which in psychological terms, are incidents that make you believe you are in danger of being seriously injured or losing your life. Research shows that these events can trigger emotional and even physical reactions that can make you more prone to a number of different health conditions, including heart attack, stroke, obesity, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, and cancer.

Child abuse is particularly likely to affect your adult life because it occurs at a time when your brain is vulnerable – and it often occurs at the hands of people who are supposed to be your protectors. This can be a sexual assault, but abuse can also mean things like being hit with a hard object like a whip, a belt, or a paddle. The behavior doesn't necessarily need to be illegal to induce a traumatic response.

A child's perception of events is as important as what actually occurred. While a child's life may not have actually been in danger, the child may have seen it as life-threatening.

Some people who have experienced traumatic events have developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychiatric condition that affect 5% to 10% of the general population. It is more common in women, affecting twice as many women as men. Many who have served in our military to protect us experience PTSD. PTSD is not limited to those who have fought in war(s). PTSD can develop after a person experiences violence or the threat of violence, including sexual violence. It may affect people who have a close relative who experienced those things as well.

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Trauma can lead to a condition known as “leaky gut”, in which the cells lining the small intestine separate, and through those passageways, proteins leak into the bloodstream that don’t belong there. When gluten and milk proteins can go into the bloodstream and cause inflammatory reactions everywhere in the body, including the brain. This damages and disrupts the microbiome and the trillions of bacteria in the intestines that are essential for gut health.

Your risk for mental and physical health problems from a past trauma goes up with the number of these events you’ve experienced. For example, your risk for problems is much higher if you’ve had three or more negative experiences, called adverse childhood experiences.

These include:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Car accident
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Substance misuse within the household
- Mental illness withing the household
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarceration of a household member

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Severely traumatic events are believed to have the greatest effect on long-term health, other stressful events that don't necessarily meet the psychological definition of trauma can still cause problems. This might include a sudden death in the family, a stressful divorce, or caring for someone with a chronic or debilitating illness. These milder events might lead to a mental health disorder which as anxiety or depression. Trauma pushes your ability to cope, so if you have a predisposition toward anxiety, for example, it may push you over the edge.

When people go through traumatic or complicated grief, they can experience pretty similar symptoms to those they might experience with trauma, such as intrusive thoughts.

Most of the research related to trauma and chronic disease risk has focused on childhood trauma. Early childhood trauma is a risk factor for almost everything, from adult depression to PTSD and most psychiatric disorders, as well as, a host of medical problems, including cardiovascular problems such as a heart attack and stroke, cancer, and obesity.

The problem goes beyond unhealthy habits. Experts believe that there is actually a direct biological effect that occurs when your body undergoes extreme stress. When you experience something anxiety-provoking, your stress response activates. Even though the experience may have happened decades ago, you can continually put yourself in the "fight or flight" response just by remembering it. Your body produces more adrenaline, your heart races, and your body primes itself to react. Someone who has experienced trauma may have stronger surges of adrenaline and experience them more often than someone who has not had the same history. This causes wear and tear on the body – just as it would in a car where the engine was constantly revving and racing. It ages your system faster.

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One of the most common outcomes of trauma is avoidance, or maybe not remembering but knowing something is there stopping you from moving forward. It makes sense. If you experience something traumatic, you want to avoid thinking about it and going to places that remind you of it. This makes it hard for some people because they don't want to talk to a health care provider or a life coach because you think you don't have anything to work through, because you are "fine".

Some people may be in denial about the role past trauma is playing in their life. People often use defense mechanisms to protect themselves from stress. Denial is one of those, as is trying to "normalize" past problems.

The mental health field has been slow to recognize the role that nutrition and supplementation can play in mental health. However, recent studies have begun to change commonly held beliefs. Just like we know healing from your autoimmune disease doesn't need to include taking medication, they are finally realizing that anti-depressants are not the only way (or the best way) to treat depression and anxiety.

The powerful effects of food on not only our physical health, but our mental and emotional well-being. If you have experienced trauma, or know anyone who has, you may have experienced either not wanting to eat anything (starving yourself) or going to comfort food: sugary, fatty, salty foods, Big Macs, mac & cheese, pop, ice cream, etc.

These comfort foods increase the levels of certain neurotransmitters in the brain that are tied to a sense of well-being, like serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins. And they actually suppress traumatic memories to some degree.

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The problem is, this is a short-term gain, and is quickly changed into a long-term downside. Serotonin starts to go down, dopamine goes down, endorphins go down, and cortisol (one of the primary stress hormones) goes up, and memories start returning. Feeling poorly and being haunted by traumatic memories can lead to an even greater reliance on unhelpful food choices, and a vicious cycle ensues.

As you have been going through this program you have learned to:

1. Prioritize healthy foods
2. Limit inflammatory foods
3. Take supplements as needed
4. Replenish healthy gut bacteria
5. Reduce stress

Throughout this program you have been learning to heal your gut. Maybe you have found some recipes that you have loved and will continue to incorporate into your weekly meal plan, but more importantly you have learned how your body reacts when you are eating to heal.

In our weekly coaching calls we have been here to support you and answer questions, and we get to see the physical and emotional changes that are happening as you are learning and gaining clarity.

The next level of coaching that you may want to invest in for yourself is our 1-1 coaching calls to dig deep and help you clear traumas from your past. This level of coaching is available, and it is truly life changing.

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