

Chronic Pain and Childhood Trauma

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If you suffer from chronic pain, this might be something that's associated with childhood trauma. Abuse, a dysfunctional home life, or a traumatic event during childhood can have an impact on a person's life, even years later. One of the common factors in people with this background is chronic pain.

Discovering the impact of childhood trauma can be difficult work—especially if you're already suffering from chronic pain. But understanding how trauma affects the body can lead to a new understanding of how issues present themselves and how our mental health affects our physical wellbeing.

Understanding the mind-body connection

[Studies](#) have shown that the brain is altered when it is under a lot of stress; if a child is exposed to trauma, over time their brain structure can change. This is a biological reaction, but social and environmental factors can also affect this development. For example, a person who grew up in poverty might have no chance of accessing mental or physical healthcare, meaning that their symptoms would go untreated.

Physical and mental health are intrinsically linked. A study from the 80s called the [Adverse Childhood Experiences Study](#) showed that the more traumatic events that happen in childhood, the higher the likelihood of developing physical disease and having mental health difficulties later in life. More recently, [new findings](#) based on this also found that patients who suffered mental or emotional distress were twice as likely to develop chronic pain.

The body and the mind are so interlinked that sometimes the body will feel things that we cannot express in words or thoughts. When a person thinks about anxiety, they can usually feel physical sensations, even before they realize they are anxious.

Growing up in a toxic environment, such as witnessing domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, or experiencing abuse of any kind, will leave an imprint on a child. If you had these experiences growing up, you may suffer with additional health problems at the same time as experiencing chronic pain.

"Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been shown to significantly increase the risk of chronic pain in adulthood, with evidence suggesting that direct traumatic events like abuse or neglect can lead to a 45% higher likelihood of developing chronic pain." [Psychology Today](#)

Determining the impact of trauma on your chronic illness

It can be challenging to look at your medical history, discerning what factors growing up might have led to the person you've developed into; however, seeing facts about your life clearly can help you understand why you have certain health conditions as an adult. Think of it like screening; it is common to look at family history to determine what diseases run in your family. This is true too for trauma; it will give you an indication of your risk factors now.

If you would like to take the quiz and find out how you scored, you can visit [ACES too High](#) and answer their 10 questions. They have summarized that:

- Childhood trauma is not limited to any one specific group. It affects all groups in society, regardless of origin or socio-economic status.
- A link exists between childhood trauma and adult-onset chronic disease, depression, suicide, violent tendencies, and becoming a victim of violence.
- People usually experience more than one type of trauma. And the more types of trauma experienced, the higher the risk of health, social, and emotional problems.

The numbers that this quiz provides can shed additional light on the factors that affect adult-onset chronic pain.

Knowing this can positively influence your life. If you think of traumas as explanatory factors, among other things, for your chronic pain, this can:

- give an idea of the possible risks associated with childhood trauma
- show you the importance of further investigation
- spur you on to seek help
- give you a starting point or key to finding the relevant help

Next steps

It's important to note that although processing childhood trauma is important, it's not a cure for chronic pain. Understanding where your pain comes from will not make it go away. However, developing an understanding of your issues will help you move through them more easily, and this means that you won't be wrestling with mental trauma while experiencing physical pain. This is why it's important to process this trauma.

Discovering that your childhood trauma has affected your chronic pain may be difficult to accept. To some, it feels like a "lightbulb" moment, where they can clearly process memories they've repressed. To others, it can have a detrimental effect, leaving them feeling as though their pain was unavoidable or that they could have had a better life if not for their trauma.

If you're struggling with these concepts and need people to talk to, you could consider joining a chronic pain support group in your area (check online for local listings). You could also consider doing research on chronic pain to understand the effect of trauma on your condition better.

Delving into one's past is something that can be helped by visiting a mental health professional—someone who might have additional tools for dealing with difficult emotions and will be able to see events objectively while ensuring your emotional needs are met. You might consider getting a

referral from your primary care provider or reaching out to your organization's assistance program.

This information is provided to supplement the care provided by your doctor or mental health professional and is not to be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your doctor or another qualified health or mental health professional if you have questions about a medical condition or plan of treatment.

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Christiane Gagnon M.Ps.

Psychologist, allied health team lead TELUS Health virtual care