

## What is trauma?

**Trauma** is an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has **lasting adverse effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

## How common is trauma?

According to a 2019 NCBI review, **70.4%** of people have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime.

A 2021 report from the American Psychological Association (APA) highlighted increased levels of stress and trauma-related symptoms among many individuals due to the pandemic's social, economic, and health-related impacts.

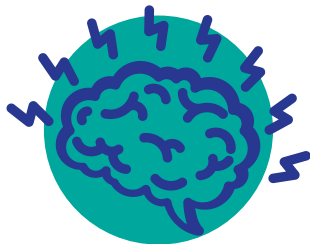
7 in 10  
people

have  
experienced  
at least 1  
traumatic  
event in their  
lifetime.

## What is toxic stress?

Moderate or normal stress is a typical part of life and can be managed with the support of caring relationships.

**Toxic stress** occurs when an individual experiences strong, frequent, or prolonged adversity without adequate support.



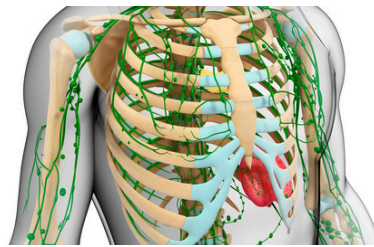
## How do trauma & toxic stress affect my physical body?

### Chronic health conditions

Prolonged exposure to toxic stress can lead to chronic conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity. Trauma also influences **pain perception**, increasing sensitivity and disrupting the brain's pain-processing system. Over time, this can contribute to chronic pain and complicate the relationship between emotional and physical sensations.

### Immune system

Chronic stress can weaken the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections and illnesses. The effect of chronic stress on hormones like cortisol can impair the body's ability to fight off pathogens and recover from illnesses.



## How do trauma & toxic stress affect my mental health?

### Cognitive function

Trauma and toxic stress can negatively affect cognitive functions such as attention, memory, and executive functioning. The brain's development can be altered, impacting learning and problem-solving abilities.

### Mental health

Exposure to trauma and toxic stress increases the risk of developing mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other mood disorders. These conditions can significantly affect day-to-day functioning and quality of life.

## How do trauma & toxic stress affect my emotional health?

### Emotional regulation

Trauma and toxic stress can impair the ability to regulate emotions. Individuals may experience intense feelings of fear, anger, sadness, or numbness, and struggle to manage these emotions effectively.

### Self esteem

Persistent exposure to trauma can lead to low self-esteem and self-worth. Individuals may develop negative beliefs about themselves and their abilities, often due to internalizing the trauma they have experienced.

### Attachment & relationships

In children, trauma and toxic stress can lead to difficulties in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships later in life.

## How do trauma & toxic stress affect my social health?

### Interpersonal relationships

Trauma and toxic stress can impact social interactions and relationships. Individuals may have difficulty trusting others, experience social withdrawal, or exhibit aggressive behavior. These challenges can affect their ability to form and sustain meaningful relationships.

### Social functioning

The impact of trauma and toxic stress can extend to social and community functioning. Individuals may face challenges in school, work, or community settings due to difficulties in concentration, social engagement, or managing stress.

### Socioeconomic impact

Long-term effects of trauma and toxic stress can contribute to socioeconomic challenges, such as lower educational attainment, job instability, and financial difficulties. These factors can perpetuate cycles of stress and adversity.

## Are trauma & toxic stress related?

The impact of trauma and stress has a **direct connection** to our physical and mental health. The body responds in the same way to trauma as it does to very stressful situations. Your stress response system gets activated in the same way.

There is a correlation between our lived experiences and how we shape/evolve in the world. Like trauma, those who are exposed to toxic stress are at increased risk of developing mental health issues. The long-term effects can persist into adulthood, contributing to physical health problems.

## Helpful Hints!

1

**"You are the priority. Give yourself the love you deserve."**

Increase emotional intelligence to explore the root cause of reactions and behaviors, and proactively identify support you may need to assist in your own regulation and well-being.

2

**"Self-care isn't selfish; it's essential."**

Implement routine activities to manage day-to-day stress levels by participating in activities that bring you joy and recharge you.

3

**"A well-tended garden grows strong and beautiful; so does a well-tended soul."**

A stable, nurturing environment, coupled with professional support such as counseling or therapeutic services, can help buffer the impacts of early trauma and promote healthier development.

## Strategies to heal from trauma or toxic stress

- **Increase emotional awareness**  
Listen to what your body is trying to tell you. Creating the space to listen can help you to respond skillfully rather than react impulsively when you are faced with stress.
- **Foster wellness**  
Take care of your body, practice mindfulness, and avoid negative outlets.
- **Embrace healthy thoughts**  
Keep things in perspective, maintain a hopeful outlook, and learn from your past.
- **Find purpose**  
Participate in a positive act by doing something that is meaningful to you.
- **Develop a strong social network**  
When we have a strong support system, our ability to co-regulate increases.
- **Seek help**  
Seeking help to develop an appropriate strategy for moving forward can be crucial in building resilience.
- **Believe in your abilities**  
Replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- **Embrace change**  
Focus on choices and actions within your control.

## Sources

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# Understanding TRAUMA AND TOXIC STRESS

Strategies to recognize trauma and toxic stress on the body

