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# How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime

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# How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime

Although the research originated in the late '90s, the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) study continues to be a source of discussion in various arenas — secular and within the church.



▲ Ingrid Slikkers

It is recommended that the importance of the study be discussed in pediatricians' offices and schools. Andrews University is intentionally looking at the 10-point questionnaire which gives the ACE "score" while considering risk and protective factors for our youth.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) along with Kaiser Permanente sought to research a long-term study for follow-up in regards to health outcomes. Originally, the intent was to look at obesity, diabetes and other health concerns that affect Americans daily. Surprising to the researchers was the fact that if an individual struggled as a child due to traumatic events such as abuse, neglect or having a parent in prison, these could develop significantly to "epidemic" proportions, affecting their physical health later in life. Not only were the percentages high in impact to physical health concerns, but other risks increased such as alcoholism, drug use, depression, suicidal tendencies and the inability to maintain employment on a consistent basis.

Sometimes in our churches, we pride ourselves, believing that because we have an excellent health message, good schools, and a focus on children and families, our children are untouched by adverse childhood events. The ideal score would be zero but, sadly, that is not always the case.

For example: Did you often feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or that your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other? Were

your parents ever separated or divorced? How would your child answer this question?

All parents can pause and answer the questions on the full questionnaire for themselves as your own childhood can affect how you parent. Then look at it through the eyes of your own child(ren). How would he/she answer the questions? Note that even a score of 1 can have significant impact, but of great concern is a score of 4 or more.

If completing the questionnaire finds you worried at what you see, please reach out, talk to your child's teacher, doctor or school social worker, and seek some counseling.

The CDC refers to the importance of providing stable, safe and nurturing relationships and environments as a way to increase the protective factors for a child, even if they score on the scale. If your child already has this type of environment, is there a child around you that may need support which you could help provide? Once again, science and research lead us to recall how God's promise is to restore all things. Let us intentionally seek ways to increase protective factors for all children. ■

ACE questionnaire: [theannainstitute.org/Finding%20Your%20ACE%20Score.pdf](http://theannainstitute.org/Finding%20Your%20ACE%20Score.pdf)

ACE Study: [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acesstudy/](http://cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acesstudy/)  
 TedTalk by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris: [ted.com/speakers/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_1](http://ted.com/speakers/nadine_burke_harris_1)

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# Sunshine in Our Soul

Our region is in the depth of winter and a common complaint is the lack of sunshine. In fact, the Current Result website reports that during the months of December, January and February, there are only an average of 10 days that have 30 percent or less cloud coverage during the entire three months.

This means there is, indeed, a lack of sunshine during the winter months. But, what does this mean in terms of our health and how we feel?

Sunshine is one of the eight natural remedies. We are counseled to "make use of the remedies that God has provided. Pure air, sunshine, and the intelligent use of water are beneficial agents in the restoration of health" (Ellen G. White, *Healthful Living*, p. 247). Sunshine is the best source of Vitamin D, and is naturally made in the body when sunshine hits the skin. Therefore, if there is limited sunshine, it could affect the level of Vitamin D in the body. Very few foods provide Vitamin D unless added by man. Then the product is referred to as "fortified."

## Why is Vitamin D important?

Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium, so it is helpful in developing strong bones. It also helps with muscle development, boosts the immune system, helps cell growth, aids in stabilizing blood pressure, and decreases inflammation.

Inadequate levels of Vitamin D is fairly common. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), approximately one in four people are affected by inadequacy which can lead to deficiency. In children, a Vitamin D deficiency can lead to a condition called rickets. This is where the bones become soft and the legs bow out. For adults, the symptoms may include depression, anxiety, fatigue, lack of endurance, rising

blood pressure, brittle bones, muscle weakness and chronic pain. The symptoms may be vague and can be present in other conditions, so it is important to discuss this with your healthcare provider.

It is worth having a conversation with your healthcare provider to determine if a simple Vitamin D blood test is necessary. For those who are deficient, treatment may be as simple as an over-the-counter remedy or a prescription strength Vitamin D. Your healthcare provider will go over your results with you and determine what treatment, if any, is best for you.

We are instructed, "Life in the open air is good for the body and mind. It is God's medicine for the restoration of health. Pure air, good water, sunshine, the beautiful surroundings of nature — these are His means for restoring the sick to health in natural ways. To the sick, it is worth more than silver or gold to lie in the sunshine or shade of the trees" (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 163). ■

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▲ Susan Allen

