



HealthyBodyHealthyLife
with *Melissa Koerner*

Total Transformation
Module 3 – Part 5:
How Unresolved Trauma Makes You
Sick, Fat & Tired!

With Nutrition, Fitness & Integrative Medicine Health Coach Melissa Koerner

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One of the Most Common (but Hidden)
Sources of Stress is Trauma!

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Childhood Trauma and Your Health

- Childhood trauma is considered the “**missing link**” for women struggling with **weight** and **autoimmunity** issues.
- The vast majority of women unable to lose weight and heal autoimmunity have **NO IDEA** that holding onto unresolved emotional hurt from past trauma **fuels** the chronic inflammation making them sick and fat.
- And most mainstream health and weight loss programs **don't** address emotional trauma, even though it's one of the most **important**, causes of weight gain and autoimmunity.

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What is Trauma?

- Trauma is defined as “**a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.**”
- There are **two** main categories of trauma:
 - Big “T” trauma.
 - Little “t” trauma.

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What is Trauma?

- **Big “T” traumas** include serious physical injury, sexual assault, emotional abuse, or a life-threatening accident.
- **Little “t” traumas** are highly distressing events that affect individuals on a personal level, but they don’t fall into the big “T” category.
 - **Examples include:** non-life-threatening injuries, death of a pet, conflict with significant others or children, infidelity, divorce, conflict with a boss or colleagues, loss of significant relationships, abrupt or extended relocation or move, losing a job or starting a new job, financial troubles, and expensive and unplanned for home repairs (these are just a few examples.)

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What is Trauma?

- A person doesn’t have to undergo an **overtly** distressing event for it to affect them.
- An accumulation of **smaller** every day or less pronounced events can be extremely **upsetting** and **traumatic**.
 - They can cause significant **emotional damage**, particularly if an individual experiences more than one event around the same time or if these traumas occur during important periods of brain development, like **early childhood** and **adolescence**.
- Evidence now concludes that **repeated** exposure to little “t” traumas can actually cause **more emotional harm** than exposure to a single big “T” traumatic event.

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Past Trauma Impacts Your Current Health

- Any kind of **UNRESOLVED** emotional trauma or distress, even from the distant past - that happened in your early childhood - **continues** to have an impact on your health well into your adulthood.
- It may **adversely** affect your current state of wellbeing by promoting **inflammation** and making you gain weight and develop autoimmunity.
- The **link** between childhood trauma and inflammation in later adulthood is now well established.

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What the Studies Reveal

- A study published in the scientific journal, "Brain, Behavior, and Immunity" concluded that adult women exposed to childhood trauma had **60%** higher inflammation levels.
- Studies further reveal that childhood trauma makes our bodies **age faster** at the cellular level and increases **inflammation** levels **decades** after exposure.
- And the **exaggerated** inflammatory response in the body, resulting from adverse childhood experiences, is linked to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, osteoarthritis, autoimmune diseases, cancer and all other immune-system and inflammation related conditions.

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Why Trauma Increases Inflammation

- The reason the inflammatory response is **heightened** as a result of childhood trauma is because adverse childhood experiences lead to a **chronic state** of “fight, flight or freeze,” which causes the continual release of an **overabundance** of stress hormones.
 - And this physically **damages** a child’s developing brain.
- Researchers at Yale have shown that when inflammatory stress hormones flood a child’s body and brain, they **alter** the genes that oversee our stress reactivity, **re-setting** the stress response to “high” for life.
 - This **increases** the risk of inflammation, which again, manifests later in adulthood as weight gain and immune-related disorders like cancer, heart disease, diabetes and autoimmune diseases.

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Trauma Can Stay in Your Nervous System

- Many trauma experts will tell you that trauma is **not** necessarily what happens to you.
 - It’s what gets **stuck** in your nervous systems as the result of a **lack** of resources to properly **digest** the experience.
 - **In other words, trauma is not just what comes in - it’s the lack of ability to get it out of your nervous system.**

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Trauma and Your Weight

- Obesity and eating disorder experts estimate that **40%** of significantly overweight people have experienced **sexual abuse**.
- And according to the Centers for Disease Control, more than **six million** overweight people are likely to have suffered physical, sexual and/or verbal **abuse** during their childhoods.
- It's likely that millions more can point to other types of **childhood trauma** – including loss of a parent through divorce, living with an alcoholic parent or a mentally ill family member – as a starting point for their weight gain.

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Trauma and Your Weight

- And there are many studies that support childhood trauma can lead to **weight gain**.
 - For example, a study published in the medical journal “Pediatrics” found that girls who were sexually abused were **twice** as likely to be overweight by age 24.

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Trauma and Food Addiction

- Further studies show that for some, sexual, emotional, or physical trauma can also lead to **eating disorders**.
- Harvard researchers studied 57,321 women enrolled in the long-term Nurses' Health Study, specifically examining the association between **childhood trauma** and **food addiction**, a form of stress-related overeating.
- They used the Yale Food Addiction Scale to assess the presence of **addictive** eating patterns.
- Their findings were striking: Both **severe** physical and sexual abuse were associated with a stunning **90%** increase in food addiction risk.

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Trauma and Food Addiction

- Women with food addiction were **6 units** of BMI **higher** than women without food addiction.
- The researchers concluded that, **"A history of child abuse is strongly associated with food addiction in this population."**
- The scientists found that approximately **80%** of the study group had been exposed to some kind of **trauma**, with **66%** noting at least one lifetime **PTSD symptom**.

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Trauma and Food Addiction

- And as the number of PTSD symptoms **increased**, so did the prevalence of food addiction.
- The women who had noted the highest levels of PTSD had more than **twice** the incidence of food addiction as the women with no PTSD symptoms or trauma history.
- This study revealed that it's critical to assess **past history** of any trauma, stress, or abuse in order to individualize treatment plans that directly address how to **manage** trauma-based behavior.

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Trauma and Binge Eating

- Another study found that out of 145 individuals with Binge Eating Disorder, **83%** reported some kind of abuse – whether it be emotional, physical, or sexual.

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How Trauma Can Lead to Weight Gain and Eating Disorders

- Here are some **biological pathways** that scientists say could be contributing.
- One is through the **over-activation** of stress hormones.
- Trauma may lead to **disturbances** in functioning of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (a.k.a. HPA axis) and the sympathetic nervous system, each of which is involved in **regulating** a broad range of body processes, including your **metabolism**.

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How Trauma Can Lead to Weight Gain and Eating Disorders

- Another reason is through unhealthy behavior patterns like **compulsive** overeating that may be used to **cope** with stress.
- As an adult of childhood trauma, your nervous system can **remain** in chronic states of stress, oscillating in and out of **traumatic** states.
- It's common to turn to food as a **coping** mechanism to **relieve** states of tension.
- This form of eating has **nothing** to do with actual hunger.
 - It's your **confusion** and **uncertainty** about your inner perceptions that lead to using food to **self-sooth** and calm down, and ultimately **check out**.

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How Trauma Can Lead to Weight Gain and Eating Disorders

- The problem is, when you're **checked out** of your body, it can be **difficult** to feel your bodily cues telling you that you've had enough to eat.
- This leads to **compulsive overeating** of hyper-palatable food combinations like sugary, fatty, and salty foods, which creates a long-term psychobiological **habit** of seeking out these foods when facing life's stressors.

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How Trauma Can Lead to Weight Gain and Eating Disorders

- For some people, weight gain can be a **consequence** of this emotional eating.
 - Emotions may become too **high-risk**.
 - You've been through so much already that you'd rather **avoid** any more hurt.
 - You'd rather **push down** the depression, anxiety, anger, confusion or pain.
 - So, you may use food to **numb** your feelings or **soothe** your discomfort.
 - And this manifests as an **eating disorder** in the form of binge eating.
 - Sometimes it's the opposite, and someone may **purge** or **restrict** their food in an effort to **control** their feelings.

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Everyone's Trauma is Unique

- It's important to note that you **don't** need to have experienced severe childhood abuse to become an adult who uses food to **self-sooth**.
- There's a **wide spectrum** of childhood abuse and trauma.
- Each child or adolescent perceives life events **uniquely**, and what is traumatic to one might be something another easily manages.
- The key is to **know your own story** and, in knowing it, enable yourself to **customize** a strategy to switch out self-destructive habits for health-promoting behaviors.

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Everyone Experiences Trauma

- You might think that you've never had trauma, but **everyone** has had traumatic experiences.
- There are **no exceptions**, just varying degrees.
- Bringing these experiences to your **awareness** doesn't mean that you dwell on them or keep rehashing them.
 - It means that you start to really **process** them with your adult brain.
- The reality is part of the human experience means you **will** be hurt.
 - Being traumatized is part of life.
 - And **healing that hurt** is what leads to **healing your body** from inflammation and disease, and ultimately losing the excess weight.

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Next Up...

Module 3 – Part 6:
**How Trauma Gets Stored in Your Mind & Body
and Creates Self-Sabotaging Behavior Patterns**