

Healing Your Toxic Stress (Part 2)

OK. You have assessed your Trauma Profile and determined that you have 6 ACE's in total. I use that number because it's how many I have identified in my life. Let me caution you before we start with healing. You might be angry at your parents, or those whom you believe, inflicted this Trauma Burden on you. The chances are very good that they also had a heavy trauma burden. Their behaviors most likely developed because of their ACE's, and they have the same probability of developing in you as they did in them. The power of family and neighborhood culture is powerful, and interacts with your Trauma Burden to develop your behaviors. Because you see their behaviors regularly, you will most likely adopt many of them.

Bear in mind that if you have debilitating high levels of trauma and are at risk of harming yourself, this healing protocol is not where you should start. If you need level 5, professional assistance, go there first. And don't be embarrassed about seeking level 5 help. Remember that what happened to you during childhood is likely the cause for your need. And if it isn't, then something that happened to you as an adult may be the cause. You do not need to feel ashamed.

If you don't seek level 5 help, then your first step in healing has been finished. And even if you are seeking level 5 help, this healing protocol can help you a lot.

You assessed your Trauma Burden and accepted its presence. If you can do that without anger, you now have the "Knowledge" that will help you heal. Healing involves acceptance and acknowledgement of your problems. Once you have done that, you can start to work at healing them.

Why is knowledge important? Dr. Vincent Felitti, a Principal Investigator of the ACE Study, found that Knowledge alone reduced the frequency of patient visits to a doctor by one third for a period of time after the Knowledge was acquired. And many doctors say they have difficulty finding cause for many medical symptoms in some patients. Shorthand for not finding any medical reason for symptoms is referred to as "Medically Unexplained Symptoms" or MUS. Research says that the reason for a lot of MUS is stress, in the form of fear and anxiety. Higher ACE Patients have higher levels of stress than lower ACE patients, and higher levels of medical and MUS visits. If your acceptance of this Knowledge is complete, and you acknowledge that many of your behaviors, Negative, Neutral and Positive, can be linked to the number of ACE's you have, you have taken the first step to healing. You understand your problems and why they exist. It's not genetic, it's not because you are a bad person, and it's not because you just are who you are. You can improve those problems that you recognize and accept

The second step I recommend for healing is based on nutrition. Many of us have poor diets. We are heading to chronic disease for a variety of reasons we need to take care of. But first, I have 3 recommendations.

Most of us do not get enough Omega 3 fatty acids. Our traditional sources of Omega 3's are no longer present. If you eat farmed fish instead of wild fish, they are deficient in Omega 3's. Meat animals and fowl raised on corn or seed usually don't have much Omega 3's. Omega 3's come from plant and algae sources that are also consumed by fish and animals. The impact of Omega 6 deficiencies show up in a lack of ability to learn, mood such as anger, and have been demonstrated to be a factor increasing suicides among U.S. Veterans. In a couple of

experiments in prisons, prisoners supplemented with Omega 3's have about a third fewer violent episodes than a non-supplemented group. And among grade school students who took Omega 3 supplements, some informal experiments have produced significant improvements in learning in the supplemented group over a non-supplemented group.

Vitamin D3 deficiencies are also common in the United States, which may contribute to depression and mental issues. And for individuals who have an inability to properly metabolize the B Vitamins, supplementation may have significant benefit, especially for people with problems with alcohol.

Nutrition may very well play a significant healing role for those of us who have multiple traumas, and should be tried before starting the next step.

The third level of healing focuses on exercise. When our brain perceives a threat, it automatically responds by releasing chemicals that prepare your body for fighting, running or, if you can do neither, freezing. Childhood trauma "Habituates" our threat response system, the hypothalamus, pituitary and adrenal glands, to higher levels of these chemicals. This means there must be more of the chemical produced in order to get a response. Think of alcohol use. The first time you use it, you can appear drunk after a few drinks. Later on, after lots of drinking, your blood alcohol levels can reach very high levels without the appearance of being drunk when you first start drinking.

The main stress response chemical is Cortisol. Cortisol forces the release of Adrenaline, Epinephrine and Norepinephrine, among others. While the stress chemicals are released to prepare you for action, we rarely get to use them by fighting or fleeing. Think about it. When you are stressed by the actions of your boss at work, fighting or running will lose you your job. If you are stressed by your romantic partner, hitting will get you in criminal trouble and running (which we do anyway) will most likely end the relationship. And when you are a child, you really can't fight effectively against adults or bigger people, and you can't run away for very long because you are very dependent on your caregivers. Believe me, I tried as a 4 year old to run away and didn't make it very far.

Our goal in this third phase of healing is to restore balance through exercise, specifically a set of exercise referred to as "Trauma Release Exercise" (TRE). Developed by Dr. David Berceli, TRE helps the body release deep muscle stress, tension and trauma. A series of 7 exercises, followed by laying on your back on a floor with your feet on the ground and your knees up, induces tremoring, a rhythmic shaking of your body. Because your body is a complex system, TRE engages your muscles to use up the chemicals through the exercises and the followup tremoring.

Why does TRE work? Well, after an animal freezes, they don't release their stress chemicals by fighting or fleeing. When the threat has passed, they begin to tremor. If you want to see a Polar Bear tremoring after a stressful event, look at this video. ([Polar Bear Link](#))

Humans also tremor when they are under great stress. Tremoring helps restore you back to a more balanced state. Exercise also releases endorphins, a chemical that helps to fight pain and stress. Other types of exercise can support balance and the release of endorphins by soothing

and calming through slow and rhythmic movement. They include Yoga, Tai Chi and Qi Jong, among others.

A fourth level of healing is one that I sometimes refer to as mentally exercising away your fear and anxiety. This explanation requires a little bit of back ground. You have a threat response system. It doesn't connect to any emotions. When your brain senses a threat, it reacts. If you had to think before you reacted, you would most likely be injured or dead. Because the threat response developed when real physical threats existed, it still reacts that way. But as I mentioned earlier, fighting or running, although they are totally normal reactions to threats, can have bad consequences in our lives. What now happens is that our emotions become connected to our threat response because of the culture we grow up in. We actually learn emotional responses like fear and anxiety because, I believe, we are not able to dissipate the Threat Response chemicals like nature intended. So we develop a capacity for unnecessary worry. Our fear response is linked to our past and because we dwell on it, it gets strong enough to activate our stress response. Anxiety is worry about the future. And because we are afraid of things that might happen to use, it also activates our stress response. Either way we lose. We build up stress chemicals and can't dissipate them unless we know about them.

So how doe we mentally exercise the stress away? We first need to learn how to become aware of what our body feels like when we encounter stress. As Cortisol is produced, our body reacts. We become tense, anxious, fearful, tired, angry, flighty, sweaty and a host of other feelings that translate through mental reactions. We react by scanning (looking for danger), hiding (sitting in a corner with our backs to a wall so nobody can sneak up), startling quickly, and in extreme cases through actions such as disassociation (mind separates from our body). Our goal is to become aware of when our body is escalating its alertness to threats, and our emotional reactions to the fear and anxiety this threat generates. We have similarities to our threat response, and we have differences. Our threat profile is personal, and may change over time. We need to become aware of escalation and counter it. I refer to escalation as our response to any threats. Body awareness is recognizing when we escalate so we can intervene.

How exactly do we intervene? During a Threat Response, our body stops any excess flow of oxygen and glucose to our thinking brain. The body's first goal is to survive, and any extra oxygen and glucose will be needed to run or fight. Because your brain uses up to 25% of the oxygen and glucose in your body, it's a natural place to draw away any excess. Your digestion stops too, as do other body functions. Your body believes it is in a fight for life, and responds with total preparation to run or fight. And as I wrote earlier, we don't usually have an option to fight or run. As we look at intervening, we must become aware of how our body reacts.

And while I do not dismiss the benefits of talk therapy, I move it to the fifth level of healing. Most of our response to threats are automatic, and are not linked to our emotions. Emotions emerge later and feed the cycle to threat response. Talk therapy is usually related to one event or relationship, and does not encompass your lengthy and frequent exposure to Childhood Trauma. And you may not remember any specifics about that Childhood Trauma. Instead, your reactions reach a higher and more frequent level than people who have little or no trauma. How can you talk about something you don't remember. Instead, there are a variety of healing techniques that have a proven benefit. They include Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), Ericksonian Hypnotherapy, Meditation and Mindfulness. Each therapy has its benefits, and there are enough of them to allow experimentation for finding out what works for you.

Let's look at one therapy that can be viewed in action through a video. Emotional Freedom Technique is also referred to as "Tapping." Gary Craig, who identified the therapy, conducted a week long healing session with six U.S. Veterans and their families. ([EFT Link here](#)) In one week, every Veteran resolved between 50% and 100% of their symptoms. That relief lasted. Because EFT does not require someone to administer it, you can practice it anytime you are aware of escalating (body awareness).

Meditation is like exercising the brain to dismiss fear and anxiety. I think of it like this. When we establish a meditation mind, we try to dismiss all thoughts and concentrate on something like our breathing. Through Meditation, we can become aware of how our body reacts to our thoughts and achieve greater awareness of our body. After a period of learning and practice, we begin to recognize thoughts as they enter our consciousness. Because our conscious mind is so limited, we have a lot of thoughts processed subconsciously. While you may not be aware of it, your subconscious mind is processing emotions related to your Threat Response system constantly. Your subconscious mind is the memory chips and processor for your brain as a computer. It's all hidden from you, and what you are aware of is on the monitor. In brain wave terms, what you are aware of occupy your "Beta" brain waves. "Alpha" brain waves are what we are trying to achieve through medication. We want to access our Theta Brain waves in order to influence our subconscious and reprogram some of its reaction to our personal Threat Response profile.

So here is the exercise part as I describe it. When you enter a Meditative frame of mind, thoughts will enter your head. They will either be Fear or Anxiety. When it enters your thoughts, greet it as an old friend, because that is what it is. It may cause you damage in your life, but I call it an old friend because it has been around for so long, and you need to realize that a fear response is just one you have developed as an emotional response to your Threat Profile. Welcome it as an old friend and tell that you will be dismissing it as soon as you are able to. Do the same with thought you recognize as Anxiety. You want to accept both thoughts because they will force their way from your subconscious into your conscious mind anyway. By welcoming the thought, treating it as an old friend, you take away the body reactions and reduce the escalation by your Threat System. As you practice, you will come to recognize your reaction and dismiss it more quickly. If you practice enough, you will find your Threat response is less frequent, and you become more adept at reacting to your body escalating because of that Threat. Your subconscious will learn this response because of your actions in teaching it.

Remember that your body reduces both oxygen and glucose to the brain in response to a Threat? Meditation teaches you how to breathe deeply. You restore oxygen to your brain through meditation. And by reducing your Threat response, you begin to slow the glucose drain and retain your ability to think. Become aware of your body's reaction to Threats (Fear and Anxiety are the emotional output of the Threat Response). Meditate it away as best you can, and strive to reach a state of "Mindfulness." Lean to live in the present, and dismiss fear and anxiety as soon as you can. Breathe and smile. Smiling releases serotonin, another good chemical that produces happiness. And say good things to yourself. Ignore the negative comment from others through mindfulness and accept that they do what they do as a reaction to their own fear and anxiety emotions.

EMDR and Ericksonian Hypnosis require outside help so if you want to try them, you need to seek a practitioner.

If you are able to achieve the first four levels of healing, you most likely will be feeling the effects after a couple of months. But keep practicing. If you have a greater need because of addiction or true mental illness, level 5 is the final level. That is to seek professional help. You may benefit from prescription drug use, and higher level healing therapies.