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NOW THAT YOU'VE GOT YOUR ACE SCORE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

First, a tiny bit of background to help you figure this out. The CDC's Adverse Childhood Experiences Study ([ACE Study](#)) [uncovered](#) a stunning link between childhood trauma and the chronic diseases people develop as adults, as well as social and emotional problems. This [includes](#) heart disease, lung cancer, diabetes and many autoimmune diseases, as well as depression, violence, being a victim of violence, and suicide.

The first research results were [published in 1998, followed by 57 other publications through 2011](#). It showed that:

- Childhood trauma was very common, even in employed white middle-class, college-educated people with great health insurance;
- There was a direct link between childhood trauma and adult onset of chronic disease, as well as depression, suicide, being violent and a victim of violence;
- More types of trauma increased the risk of health, social and emotional problems.
- People usually experience more than one type of trauma – rarely is it only sex abuse or only verbal abuse.

A whopping two thirds of the 17,000 people in the ACE Study had an ACE score of at least one – [87 percent of those](#) had more than one. Eighteen states have done their own ACE surveys; their results are similar to the CDC's ACE Study.

The study's researchers came up with an ACE score to explain a person's risk for chronic disease. Think of it as a cholesterol score for childhood toxic stress. You get one point for each type of trauma. The higher your ACE score, the higher your risk of health and social problems. (Of course, other types of trauma exist that could contribute to an ACE score, so it is conceivable that people could have ACE scores higher than 10; however, the ACE Study measured only 10 types.)

As your ACE score increases, so does the risk of disease, social and emotional problems. With an ACE score of 4 or more, things start getting serious. The likelihood of chronic pulmonary lung disease [increases](#) 390 percent; hepatitis, 240 percent; depression 460 percent; suicide, 1,220 percent.

(By the way, lest you think that the ACE Study was yet another involving inner-city poor people of color, take note: The study's participants were 17,000 mostly white, middle and upper-middle class college-educated San Diegans with good jobs and great health care – they all belonged to the Kaiser Permanente health maintenance organization.)

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