

Asking about your adverse childhood experiences (ACE) helps us identify problems you have faced as a child that may affect your health today. It also helps you understand how ACEs may affect your child's development. Awareness is the first step in learning how to reduce the risk of physical and mental health problems for you and your child. Did you know that highly stressful or traumatic experiences during childhood can affect how a child's brain develops?

ACEs are common and occur across all income levels, groups, and cultures. Several large research studies, including one in Calgary, show that roughly two thirds of people have experienced at least one ACE before the age of 18.

ACEs increase a person's risk of having physical, mental, or emotional health problems throughout their life. For example, a person with 4 ACEs is twice as likely to develop diabetes, anxiety, depression, lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD) or heart disease compared to a person with no ACEs. The good news is that research shows that there are things you can do that can protect your health and the health of your children.

Please remember that having a health risk factor is not the same as having a health problem. Having a risk factor means that your chances of having health problems are higher than a person who doesn't have that risk factor. Thankfully, it's not a 100% guarantee that you will end up with health problems but it does mean that you should put effort into decreasing your risk.

But what about adults who have ACEs? Is it too late? No! We hope knowing about the long-term effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) empowers you to become the best parents you can be.

If you do not want to participate, please let the nurse or physician know.

So what can you do? Here are four basic strategies to help you decrease your health risk today, regardless of whether or not you have ACEs. The scientific evidence on their ability to lower risk for many physical and mental health problems is encouraging:

- Get enough sleep every night.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and avoid processed foods.
- Exercise for a minimum of 30 minutes at least 3 times per week.
- Spend time with good, supportive friends.

Please see the back of the sheet for resources to help you learn more about ACEs.

- Background Info:
 - Alberta Family Wellness Initiative – Videos on the impact of ACEs on brain development
 - <http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/how-brains-are-built-core-story-of-brain-development>
 - Alberta Health Services *Ready or Not* website
 - <https://readyornotalberta.ca/ready/healthy-mind-and-body/adverse-personal-experiences/#2640>
 - Dr. Dawn Kingston – Chair of Perinatal Mental Health ---“What’s Normal in Pregnancy?”
 - www.drdawnkingston.com
 - Aces Too High <https://acestoohigh.com/>
- Parenting information related to ACEs:
 - Centre for Disease Control
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>
 - Healthy Parents, Healthy Children – Pregnancy and Birth Book (page 12-14)
 - Parenting Resources – www.foothillsnetwork.ca
 - Contact Joyce Kooistra, Network Navigator, at 403-995-2705 or at joyce.kooistra@ahs.ca for more information about local resources
 - Book extra prenatal appointments with our registered midwife, Kathleen, to explore the option of creating a modified birth plan related to your adverse childhood experiences

Self-help online resources:

- <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app> (a very useful smart phone app)
- <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/>
- <https://ecouch.anu.edu.au/welcome>
- <https://smilingmind.com.au>
- <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/> (online self-help workbooks- available to print at home)
- anxietybc.com/parents/moms-to-be

Call Access Mental Health:

- In Calgary: 403-943-1500
- In rural areas: 1-877-652-4700

There are a variety of community and Alberta Health Services programs to choose from. The helpful staff of the Foothills Children’s Wellness Network can help you find and choose the right program for you. You can reach them at 403-995-2705.