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Trauma in Childhood Could Contribute to Obesity in Adults
*Screening and early treatment may help decrease chances of
weight problems and improve overall health*

DEERFIELD, IL -- January 18, 2011—Scientific studies often attribute obesity to poor nutrition and lack of activity, but recent research has identified childhood traumatic stress as a potential risk factor for obesity in adulthood.

The research, published in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, included 148 adult women. Eric A. Dedert, Ph.D., lead author for the study and research psychologist at the North Carolina Veterans Affairs Medical Center, says that nearly half of the women studied reported exposure to childhood physical and/or sexual abuse. Almost 80 percent of the women had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression or both.

The women who reported abuse were more likely to experience PTSD and depression, and were also more likely to be overweight in adulthood.

Although the study suggests an association between childhood trauma and obesity, the study also suggests that how a person reacts to trauma can influence adult weight. The research indicates that PTSD and depression may account for the relationship between childhood trauma and weight problems in adulthood.

The study concludes that children who experience trauma could benefit from intervention to prevent obesity. Screening and early treatment of psychiatric disorders could help curb weight problems and improve physical and mental health in adulthood.

This study is published in the December 2010 issue of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*.

Eric A. Dedert, Ph.D., is a research psychologist at North Carolina Veterans Affairs Medical Center and research associate at the Duke University Medical Center. Dr. Dedert has received a career development award from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate the combination of Cognitive Processing Therapy with Integrated Care for smoking cessation in PTSD. His research interests include smoking cessation interventions, genetic predictors of smoking cessation, physical activity and weight problems in PTSD and stress-related disruption of circadian cortisol rhythms.

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[The Journal of Traumatic Stress](#) (JTS), the official publication for the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, is an interdisciplinary forum for the publication of peer-reviewed original papers on biopsychosocial aspects of trauma. Papers focus on theoretical formulations, research, treatment, prevention education/training, and legal and policy concerns. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* serves as a primary reference for professionals who study and treat people exposed to highly stressful and traumatic events (directly or through their occupational roles), such as war, disaster, accident, violence or abuse (criminal or familial), hostage-taking, or life-threatening illness.

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