

Assessment

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Exposure to challenges and traumas during childhood—called Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs—can raise the risk for weight gain and obesity.

Examples of ACEs include:

Emotional abuse
Physical abuse
Sexual abuse
Substance abuse
Mental illness
Domestic violence
Incarceration
Economic hardship

ACEs also can cause episodes of chronic emotional and physical stress, which, over time, can become what is known as "toxic stress." Besides obesity, toxic stress can increase the risk for other health conditions during childhood and into adulthood, such as:

- Cognitive impairment
- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Chronic inflammation
- Cancer

Providers should always screen for ACEs as a possible cause for weight issues. Understanding a child's social, emotional, and familial circumstances can help them offer proper guidance.

The ACEs Questionnaire has become an accepted screening tool. You can find a sample of the questionnaire and more information and resources about ACEs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.