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Two Different Studies Show the Physical Damage Extreme Stress Does to Children

By [Antoinette McGowan](#), published Mar 14, 2007

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Stress has long been known to be harmful to a person's health. Now a [study](#) published March 5th, shows that [children](#) in families facing chronic [stress](#) such as conflict between [parents](#) or violence in the [home](#) become sick more often than [children](#) under less stress.

Dr. Mary Caserta at the University of Rochester Medical Center in Rochester, [New York](#) led a group of researchers, who tracked the incidence of fevers in 169 [children](#) ages 5-10 from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

It was unclear the reason why [children](#) from stressful families experienced fevers more often, according to researchers. The [study](#) did show that [children](#) from stressful [homes](#) had a stronger immune system. Blood samples showed that these [children](#) had stronger functioning of certain key cells in the immune system.

Researchers were seeking a greater understanding of the effect of chronic [stress](#) on children's health.

Caserta had said during an interview, "I think people on the street believe this unflinchingly-stress makes you sick."

The [parents](#) of the [children](#) were required to track chronically stressful [events](#) in the [family](#) and their own [symptoms](#) over the course of the study. They had to keep a diary of their kids' [health](#) and were given a [digital](#) thermometer.

A list of stressful conditions included conflict in the home, parental anxiety and depression, parental poverty and unemployment along with violence in the [home](#) or neighborhood.

The [study](#) was published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine. It found that the [children](#) under [stress](#) experienced more fevers than other children.

US scientists also have discovered that [stress](#) can damage a child's brain. Stress has been shown in studies to raise levels of a [stress](#) hormone called cortisol. Cortisol has been shown to kill hippocampus cells in animals. Now researchers are linking this to withered hippocampus in children.

Pediatrics journal reports that a withered hippocampus may make a [child](#) less able to deal with [stress](#) and raise anxiety.

Lead researcher at the Stanford University Medical Center, Victor Carrion said that the [stress](#) had to be extreme to cause the damage. "We are not talking about the [stress](#) of doing your homework or fighting with your dad," Dr Carrion said.

It will take more research on both of these studies to see what exactly the long term effects are. But clearly it is already showing signs that extreme amounts of [stress](#) in a [child](#) are far from healthy. Researchers are still a ways away from finding out just what long-term physical damage extreme [stress](#) is doing to these young children.

Sources:

BBC News:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/6411351.stm>

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Reuters:

http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20070305/hl_nm/stress_children_dc

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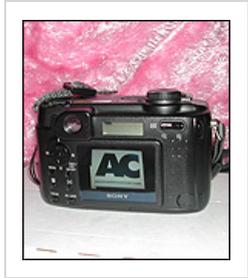
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[Leigh Vaughn](#)

I have no doubt stress in the home causes depression and anxiety.

Posted on 04/01/2007 at 2:04:00 PM

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Thank you for bringing attention to this. Parents of children or teens who notice signs of stress should definitely mention it to their child's doctor. I had chronic sinus infections (and took antibiotics) for about 6 months until a doctor or naturopathy suggested that we treat the stress. I have not had another in 7 1/2 years. My regular doctor may have been able to help if she had known, or if we had known to discuss it with her.

Posted on 03/16/2007 at 5:03:00 AM

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[Sophia S.](#)

sheesh, I hate stress. Thanks for this article, want to read the full report now.

Posted on 03/14/2007 at 5:03:00 PM

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[Carol Gilbert](#)

this would be very tricky to study and relying on parental reports of stressors to their kids would not be especially reliable. But I am glad you wrote about this. It is very interesting to read.

Posted on 03/14/2007 at 5:03:00 PM

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