

How Can ACEs Screening Help?

ACEs stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences. ACEs are common, about two-thirds of adults have at least one ACE. ACEs include things like neglect, abuse, caregiver mental illness, divorce, and household violence. When childhood stressful experiences are too intense or too frequent and lack a supportive loving adult, it can lead to toxic stress. Untreated toxic stress can harm our bodies and brains causing physical and mental health issues.

This clinic has added an ACE screening to the list of other screens we ask all our patients to complete. Learning your ACE score will help this healthcare team provide you and your baby with better care. However, if you choose not to complete it at this time, we support your choice. When you so decide, you may complete it at a later date.

Preventing ACEs is ideal. For those who have already experienced ACEs, there are ways to decrease their effects. Let us know what questions you may have. We are here to help. ACEs can be treated. Your ACE score is not your destiny; your and your family's story is more than a number.

Stress Busters:

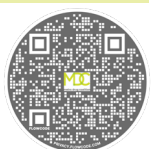
Our medical teams are still learning about ACEs. However, there is agreement among professionals that all of us facing challenges do better if we have at least one stress buster in our lives. Learning how to reduce the stress from ACEs can improve both your/your family's physical and mental health. Talk to your healthcare team if you have any questions or concerns. It is never too late. Proven reducers of ACEs stress are:

- Getting regular quality sleep
- Eating healthy food
- Getting regular physical activity
- Practicing mindfulness like yoga, meditation, and deep breathing
- Spending time in nature
- Gaining access to behavioral healthcare services
- Building and maintaining supportive relationships



Thanks to ACEs Aware, and for more information visit [ACEsAware.org](https://www.ace aware.org).

This project was funded from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services.





Getting A Good Night's Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep plays an important role in our mental health, physical health, and overall well-being. Quality sleep is just as important as nutrition and physical activity.

Studies have shown when we get a good night's sleep, we are sick less frequently, experience improved focus, are more productive, and manage stress more easily.

Ideas to help get a good night's sleep:

Keeping routines regular

We all benefit from predictable routines. Doing the same activities at bedtime can help you relax into sleep more easily. Reading or talking quietly with a trusted person are good ideas and can help you toward getting a good night's sleep.

Keeping bedtimes and wakeup times regular

Our bodies are healthier and our brains work better when our sleep schedule is regular and predictable. A regular bedtime routine and schedule also helps us fall asleep more easily.



Keeping the sleeping space restful and calm

We sleep better where the light is dim, noise levels are low, and temperature is cool (high 60s to low 70s). Avoid television, phone, laptops in the sleep space. Studies show the light from these devices keep us from feeling sleepy.

Staying active during the day

Making physical activity like a walk to the park, visiting friends, or practicing yoga helps us have an easier time going to sleep and also helps us have better quality sleep.

Seeking support from a healthcare provider

Talk to your OB-GYN or primary health care provider if you are experiencing sleep difficulties.





Improving Nutrition

Before making dietary changes talk with your primary health care provider and/or your OB-GYN. Becoming pregnant or just thinking about becoming pregnant is a great time to make the commitment to eat healthier.

Being stressed increases our craving for foods high in sugar and fat. Over time, this can lead to obesity, mood, and sleep problems. Taking a few simple steps to improve your nutrition can decrease the risks.

Ideas to help your nutrition:

Eating together as a family

Set aside times for meals and eat together as often as possible. This is a great time to build healthy eating habits and strong family bonds. Tell your family about your day and ask them about theirs. Try to avoid screens at the table and try to be mindful of each other during this time.

Drinking water with every meal and snack

Limit juices, sodas, and sugary drinks. Instead, develop the healthy habit of drinking water.



There is an app for that

There are apps and websites full of helpful information. For help in making better food choices, go to [MyFitnessPal](https://www.myfitnesspal.com) or [AuntBertha](https://www.auntbertha.com), and a website to locate local Farmers Markets is [LocalHarvest](https://www.localharvest.org).

Starting every day with a healthy breakfast

Eating a healthy breakfast complete with fruit, grains, and protein will help you start each day with good energy. Studies show adults and children who eat breakfast daily are less likely to be overweight.

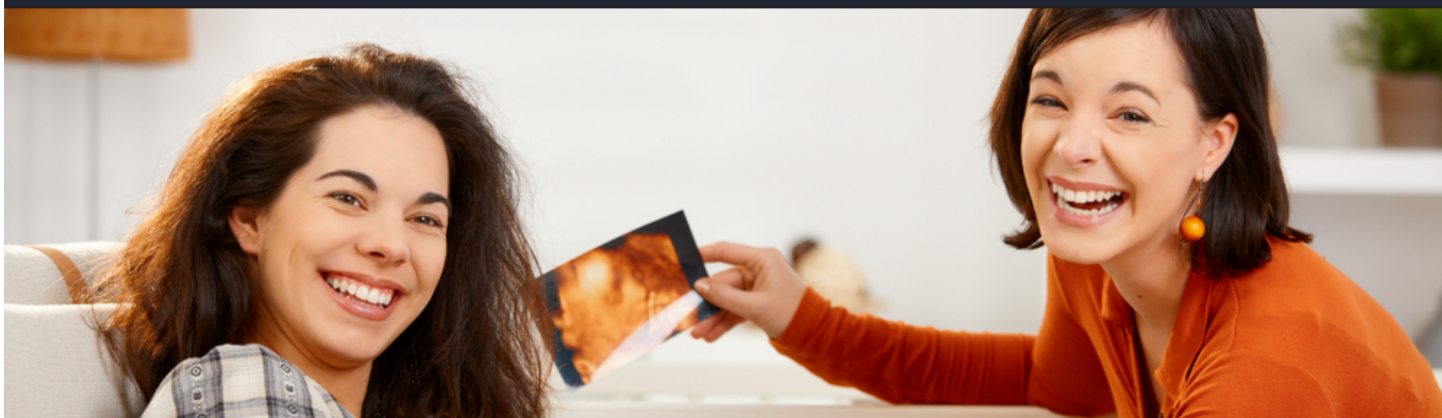
Knowing how to add healthy foods

- Make your sandwiches with whole wheat bread.
- Serve fresh, frozen or canned colorful fruit and veggies.
- Increase lean proteins by baking, grilling, or broiling.

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Building Supportive Relationships

All families face difficulties. Some challenges and stress are too intense or frequent for us to cope. This is especially true when these events occurred in our childhood *and* have remained unaddressed.

Loving, supportive relationships can help reduce the physical and mental health effects of stress. Seek out the supportive relationships you need, and know our office staff is here for you.

Ideas about supportive relationships:

^a Making supportive relationships a priority

We all need reliable supportive relationships to share thoughts and feelings. Look around your community to find and build strong relationships by connecting with family, friends, faith communities, mentors, and local organizations such as parenting groups. Signs of a healthy relationship are:

- has regular quality time to talk and share
- can connect and show empathy
- is encouraging
- pays attention to details
- helps when help is asked for
- listens and can withhold judgment
- will cheer for each other
- can express intentions and is honest and thoughtful
- fosters emotional safety



We now know experiencing multiple ACEs when we are children contributes to our risk of partner abuse and violence. Our office is here to help you and your family feel safer. Let us know if you need help.

Tennessee Domestic Violence Helpline: 1-800-365-6767 has counselors available 24/7 to offer referrals and supportive listening , and help with safety planning.

The National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262 is available 24/7/365, is confidential, text and/or call, and available in 60+ languages.

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Practicing Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness is being aware of the immediate or present feelings, thoughts, and sensations inside you, and can help turn our stress response down.

Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can reduce all kinds of stress, including the stress of pregnancy and parenting.

Ideas to bring mindfulness into your life:

Paying close attention to details

While playing, walking, sharing meals, or driving home pay attention to the details of your surroundings. Practicing being mindful can happen anytime, anywhere.

Practicing mindfulness gets easier everyday

Practicing mindfulness everyday will help build the habit faster while also helping calm down your stress response. Give yourself a break from what happened yesterday or could happen tomorrow by putting your attention on what is happening now.

There is an app for that

Helpful resources can be found at [SmilingMind](#) and [AuntBertha](#).

Learning and teaching deep belly breathing

Deep belly breathing is a good path to a relaxed state that you can learn and practice anywhere.

- Sit or lie down.
- Place one hand on your belly, and one hand on your chest.
- Breathe in through your nose while feeling your belly rise.
- Breathe out through your mouth while feeling your belly lower.
- Repeat this three to five times and try to keep it fun.
- Practice and model this with your family. For instance you might say, “I’m so stressed by this traffic, but I can’t change it. Please help me calm my mind and body by taking a few belly breaths with me.” You and your family can talk later about how it felt, and how it helped you feel better.



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Getting Exercise

Before making exercise changes talk with your primary healthcare provider and/or your OB-GYN. Becoming pregnant, or just thinking about becoming pregnant is a great time to make a commitment to become more active. Getting daily exercise helps improve mood and concentration, boosts our immune system, eases feelings of anxiety and depression, and reduces stress hormones in our bodies.

Being physically active with your family is even better, and it can be a lot of fun for all of you!

Ideas to help you get enough exercise:

Turning off the screens

We all benefit from limited screen time. This includes: phones, televisions, laptops and other electronic devices. Outside of work try to limit screen time to less than two hours per day.

Building play into your schedule

Making physical activity a priority will help make it happen regularly. Put play on your calendar, and plan active family outings. Playing together is great for bonding!



There is an app for that

There are apps and websites full of helpful information. A free app that can help you find time for fitness, even with a busy schedule, is [7 Minute Workout](#) and a website with helpful information is [Aunt Bertha](#).

Being active everyday

Think about walking. An easy way to increase your steps is, when running errands, park as far from the entrance as you are comfortable. This is a great opportunity to build daily “step” totals and just doing this really adds up.

Making exercise fun for you and your family:

- Go for walks with your kids around your neighborhood playing I Spy.
- Go for a walk around your local park with a friend or partner.
- Take your children to the playground, playing with them will be fun and deliver a lot of good exercise for you.

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Improving Mental Health

Tending to our mental health is just as important as tending to our physical health. Seek help as soon as you notice a problem. You can talk to your OB-GYN or primary health care provider to help find mental health services.

Our medical community is learning many chronic medical conditions result from toxic stress that occurs during childhood. Let's work together and break the cycle of passing down stress and ACEs.

Ideas to help your mental health:

Sharing worries and concerns with your healthcare providers

Being willing to share worries and concerns about your struggles is a great first step toward healing and wellness.

Seeking help

If you experienced struggles or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as a child, and have physical or mental health issues, consider seeking professional help. The medical community is learning more everyday about the role stress can have on our lives. Parents with unaddressed ACEs can find they have difficulty bonding and parenting their own baby. By addressing one's own ACEs we can be healthier, less stressed and better prepared to break cycle of adversity that can follow families. Some reasons to talk with your provider and seeking help are:

- Wanting to know more about health conditions linked to toxic stress and ACEs
- Being curious about how your ACEs can affect your health
- Wanting to learn how ACEs are passed down, and how to break that cycle
- You are experiencing sadness, depression, anxiety, panic, or sleep difficulties
- You are experiencing abuse or violence



There are things to do that can result in you and your child having healthier bodies and brains. Counseling and other mental health services can be helpful for us all, and especially for those of us who have faced difficulties. A helpful resource in finding services is [AuntBertha](#).

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Experiencing Nature

Experiencing nature helps reduce stress and calms our bodies and brains. What we see, hear, and experience affects our mood and how our nervous, hormone, and immune systems work.

The stress of an unpleasant environment can make us feel anxious, sad, or helpless. A pleasing environment can reverse that. Exposure to nature can act as a buffer for life stresses and increase our capacity to cope.

Ideas to help you gain the health benefits of nature:

Getting outside and into nature

Exposure to nature helps us feel better and also helps our physical and mental health by reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and stress hormones.

Helping us focus

Enjoying nature or green-spaces can also help improve our attention. Research shows those of us with ADHD have better attention spans after time in nature.

There is an app for that

There are apps and websites full of helpful information. Use your phone photo app and learn the name of trees and flowers on your walks, and a website to find a park near you is [ParkFinder](#).



Turning off the screen

Limit screen time, including phones, televisions, laptops, and other electronic devices to two hours or less, outside of work, per day.

Being creative to add nature to your life

Nature can be found all around us, go along with your partner or family when they play an outdoor sport, read next to a window, or take a walk around the block.

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