

All News

Misc. News

- [Featured Products](#)
- [Recalls & Alerts](#)
- [Consumer Affairs](#)
- [Non-food Things](#)
- [Letter to Editor](#)
- [Health Tips](#)
- [Interesting Sites](#)

Diet & Health

- [Heart & Blood](#)
- [Cancer](#)
- [Body Weight](#)
- [Children & Women](#)
- [General Health](#)
- [Nutrition](#)

Food & Health

- [Food Chemicals](#)
- [Biological Agents](#)
- [Cooking & Packing](#)
- [Technologies](#)
- [Agri. & Environ.](#)
- [Laws & Politics](#)

Food Consumer

- [FC News & Others](#)

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[General health News](#)

MISC. NEWS : NON-FOOD THINGS

Last Updated: **Mar 5, 2007 - 2:32:26 PM**

Stress increases [cortisol](#), reduces brain size in children

By David Liu - foodconsumer.org
Mar 4, 2007 - 6:40:45 PM

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Children should not be stressed as a new study shows that stress a child experienced may cause shrinkage of a key part of the [brain](#), affecting his or her memory and emotion.

The study linked the shrinkage with high levels of the stress

hormone cortisol, which was found high in those who experienced high levels of [stress](#).

Stanford University researchers tracked changes in the volume of the hippocampus - responsible for memory and emotional control - in traumatized children and found the association between stress and the size of the key part of the brain.

The findings suggest that stress may indeed cause damage to the hippocampus, potentially leading to psychiatric and [learning disorders](#), according to Victor Carrion, lead author of the study and a child psychiatrist in the university's Department of [Psychiatry](#) and Behavioral Sciences.

The study published in the journal [Pediatrics](#) involved 15 children aged eight to 14 who all had suffered traumatic events including witnessing violence, physical abuse, separation and loss, sexual abuse, physical neglect and emotional abuse. They were all diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder such as flashbacks and startling easily.

Hormone cortisol levels were analyzed from saliva swabs and the volume of the hippocampus of each child was measured at the beginning and the end of the one-year study. The children were examined for the severity of their stress disorder symptoms.

The researchers found that those who had the highest levels of stress and cortisol levels at the start of the study showed most

TESTIMONIAL

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shrinkage, prompting the researchers to believe that cortisol might be toxic directly to the hippocampus.

The shrinkage of the brain also explains why many post-traumatic stress disorder patients have a hard time organizing their thinking.

The take home message is, a foodconsumer.org scientist suggests, that parents should try to prevent children from being exposed to events that may cause stress in them. In addition, they should try to avoid using drugs in their children that may be similar to cortisol.

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