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This is Dr. Eric Zielinski from Dr. Eric Z dot com. Today my special guest is Niki Gratrix. We're going to be discussing the impact of stress and emotional trauma on gut health, and specifically, what to do about it. For those of you who don't know Niki and aren't familiar with her work, Niki is an award winning internationally renowned registered nutritionist and health writer who helps people to optimize their energy.

In 2005 she cofounded one of the largest clinics in integrative medicine in the UK, with patients in thirty-five countries where she worked as director of nutrition until 2010. The clinic specialized in treating chronic fatigue syndrome/ME, won the award for outstanding practice in 2009, and later published a preliminary study in 2012 on its results with patients in the British Medical Journal, Open.

The theoretical basis of the clinic's approach was published in renowned philosopher and theoretical psychologist, Ken Wilber's Journal of Integral Theory in Practice. In August of 2015 Niki hosted the largest ever free online health summit on overcoming fatigue, interviewing twenty-nine world leading experts on optimizing energy, with over thirty thousand attendees. If you're interested in learning more you could go to abundanenergysummit.com. She writes regularly for a range of health magazines in both the UK and US, and speaks internationally at health conferences, and has appeared on both radio and TV shows. Niki is currently the education director at Supercharged, a division of NES Health.

Well Niki, welcome.

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Niki: Thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Zielinski: Niki, I have to tell you it really is an honor to meet you today. This is our first time chatting. Your reputation precedes you. Being in the summit world I know what everyone is doing right now. When you launched your Abundant Energy Summit, I heard some fantastic reviews. Really, people told me that this was the best information that they heard, I mean just flat out, just the people that you brought. Just thank you for that, because I'm doing this; I know how much time and energy it takes.

Niki: Thank you so much. It was amazing to do it and it's one of the best things I've ever done. I enjoyed it. Yeah, we did put out a huge amount of information for free and it was great. I really enjoyed it. Thank you for that feedback as well.

Dr. Zielinski: People can still go get that, correct, if they wanted to take advantage of that?

Niki: Yeah, www.theabundantenergysummit.com.

Dr. Zielinski: Perfect, and folks you could go to it, check it out. I'm sure that if they registered they could get a few interviews for free, right? It's just a great opportunity folks to take advantage of that.

Let's really dive into this because there is such a connection between emotional trauma, gut health, and stress. In your opinion, from your experience, how does stress and emotional trauma affect gut health and how important is it?

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through our mouths, goes down through the esophagus. It's that stomach acid which literally sterilizes the food that we eat. Stomach acid then also will give us the right acid/alkaline base following on into the stomach and so on.

Stomach acid and the digestive enzymes are incredibly important. If we're in chronic stress, those things tend to reduce, so we're not digesting our food properly. It's going to lead to things like increased intestinal permeability, a leaky gut. There are also studies out there confirming that. For example, prenatal stress leads to leaky gut dysbiosis in infant monkeys and rats, and that's long term, as they showed that in studies. It's the same with what we call adverse childhood events. When children or animals are young, it leads to dysbiosis. There are studies, once again in infant monkeys and rats. If you take the baby rats or the monkeys away from their mothers too soon, it actually causes dysbiosis and it stays there long term.

This is hugely important for our long term gut health, is our chronic levels of stress, but also stress that we've had early in childhood. Just coming back to the idea that the parasympathetic side of the nervous system, if you like, is our rest, digest, detoxify. If we're in the sympathetic side of things chronically then we're just going to be down-regulating digestion and so on. That's going to lead to digestive problems.

There are even post doctoral theses on vagus nerve actually regulating gut inflammation. We love the vagus nerve. It's been called the nerve of compassion and it causes the relaxation response, and it reduces

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inflammation when it's in balance. We will suppress the vagus nerve when we're in chronic stress. This is a key area.

One of these important areas as well is adverse childhood experiences are going to be a huge factor for chronic illnesses related to gut in later life. Part of the key reason I talk about stress, about what happens in childhood, is because a stressor actually gets programmed into the body-mind, and particularly in the limbic system of the brain. If you have a one-off shock or stress, or you have a low level intermittent exposure to stress, it will actually do something called "limbic kindling," which means it will actually kindle the brain to automatically be in a constant state of stress, even when the stress is not there anymore. The threshold of the stressor would also reduce. In other words, you need less and less stress for the brain to become kindled and to react.

With this kind of limbic stress, basically you become hardwired for stress. You're actually building neurons in the brain with this one off shock or this low level intermittent exposure. You're getting hardwired and that is obviously going to have that cascade effect, which is everything I said; changes in the immune system, the endocrine system, the adrenal output, and lowered digestion. Right from childhood, if you have those kind of stresses, your body-mind is actually becoming hardwired that way for good. Children's brains are particularly vulnerable to these kind of emotional stresses because their brains are still developing. Their neurons are still developing.

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Early shocks in childhood, the studies have shown, for example, increased fear responses in the amygdala. The amygdala is the fear processing or the emotional processing section of the brain. That then speaks to the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which is that whole cascade effect through the rest of the body. We also know that emotional trauma in childhood impacts something called the nucleus accumbens, which is involved with the pleasure processing center, which is linked to addictions. It even affects how the DNA is read and transcribed. Trauma in childhood has a huge impact on our long term health. Certainly regarding digestion, it would be setting up a situation in later life for major digestive problems.

Dr. Zielinski: Now Niki, you just shared something I never heard before, this concept of limbic kindling. Is there a threshold? For example, does it have to be a traumatic stressful event or what exactly triggers this?

Niki: Yeah, very interesting. With limbic kindling the trigger can actually be electrical, chemical, emotional, or infectious. It could be any of those four things. All those stresses, the body doesn't differentiate between them. It will respond to any of those types of stresses the same way. Actually, early experiments, once again with rats, where there's a researcher called Goddard who stimulated the brains of rats intermittently to low level ... And he did it with an electrical stimulation and he did it with chemicals. He would actually kindle their brains so that just a small amount intermittently would actually cause the rat brain to go into kindling with no stress there.

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The kindling model is actually a model used in epilepsy. It's a theoretical basis for understanding how epilepsy works. My area is chronic fatigue syndrome. The world leading expert in the case definition of fatigue, which is Dr. Leonard Jason, has been writing theoretical papers about that, limbic kindling being a cause of chronic fatigue, which is just an extreme form of stress in one way.

We'll talk more about what kind of adverse childhood events and emotional stresses could cause it, but one thing we could definitely say is things like low level exposure to toxins, chemicals, heavy metals, even the kind of levels we're seeing and are bombarded with in the environment would trigger this. I would also go as far in saying that even now with all the Wi-Fi and electromagnetic stress that we have around us all the time, I think people are starting to get kindled to that too. That's chronic hardwiring into stress for the body, which is creating these multiple changes in the body, and definitely a huge impact on gut.

Dr. Zielinski: You know what, what I'm hearing here, and I just process this with you, is that it all starts in utero? What we are finding are so many toxins cross, not only the blood-brain barrier, but they cross the placenta. Low levels of mercury, lead, cadmium. When you have these stressors ... I guess I'm just piecing it all together because it's unbelievable. What I'm getting from this and what I've really gotten from a lot of the interviews I've done is that when a child is born, they automatically start in a very challenging mode. It's not like these children are born in a bubble in utopia. They're born into battle immediately.

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It's interesting Niki, because when we talk about this, why would one person be affected in one way where another isn't affected? It's like a low level stress can trigger a traumatic response in one person, yet for someone else they could handle it. It's very interesting. With that, I'd like if you could talk a little bit about that because what are these "adverse childhood effects," and how are they even related to gut issues?

Niki: Very interesting. I totally agree with what you just said there though as well, that babies are stressed before they've even come out of the womb. That's one of the major themes that babies and very young children can be stressed. The stress of birth, what about a traumatic birth as well? When things like that are happening, as well as potential toxins they could be exposed to, you're getting the kindling and the stress already, and at higher levels than we've ever known before. This chronic stress which is then wired in and has all these long term negative effects.

Post birth, there's been major studies done on what are called adverse childhood events. They surveyed emotional trauma in childhood. I think this is one of the most important areas which I just don't think we've had enough attention on. The studies are there and these are major studies. Adverse childhood events, just to give you an idea about how big the studies are and important these are, they're called ACEs, adverse childhood events, first studied in the mid 1990s. It was the CDC and Kaiser Permanente, looked at seventeen and a half thousand adults, looked at their health statistics over a lifetime, and correlated them with whether they had one or more ACEs.

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When we talk about ACEs we are talking about in the case of what they were looking at these studies. It was physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, physical and emotional neglect, parents separating or divorce, domestic violence, mental illness in the family like a parent, substance abuse, or incarceration. The incredible statistics from these seventeen and a half thousand adults are ... First of all, sixty-seven percent of all adults have at least one ACE. If you have a high level of ACEs, this is correlated with a dramatic increase in risks of seven out of the ten of the top causes of death in the USA.

Dr. Zielinski:

Wow.

Niki:

Yeah, it's stunning. One in eight have four or more ACEs, about twelve and a half percent have seven or more ACEs. If you have four or more ACEs in childhood, your relative risk of things like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is two point five times higher than people, for example, with zero ACEs. Hepatitis is two point five times higher, depression four point five times higher, suicidal twelve times. If you have eight or more ACEs, you have triple the risk of lung cancer and three point five times the risk of heart disease. Some of the other statistics, for example in chronic fatigue syndrome show, you have a three to eight fold increase in the risk of adult onset chronic fatigue with ACEs. There are many studies around showing, for example, sixty-five percent of women with fibromyalgia have suffered sexual abuse in childhood.

Being gut specific for a second, the same people who did the original study in the mid '90s, in 2009 they completed a study with fifteen thousand three

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hundred adults, looking at the relative risk of developing autoimmunity. Obviously all the autoimmune illnesses are very much related to gut health because it's the inflammatory aspect of that. What they found is if you have two or more ACEs in childhood, you're a hundred percent more likely to get diagnosed with rheumatic diseases.

For the TH1 dominant conditions, autoimmune conditions like type one diabetes, multiple sclerosis, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, Grave's disease, Crohn's disease, psoriasis, celiac disease, and chronic viral infections, you've seventy percent increased risk if you have two or more ACEs. On the TH2 dominant conditions, things like lupus, allergic dermatitis, atopic eczema, sinusitis, inflammatory bowel disease, asthma, allergies, ulcerative colitis and multiple chemical sensitivity you've got an eighty percent increase risk just with two or more ACEs.

If you think about ACEs, how many people have had a parent that has had separation or a divorce in childhood? You think about how common these are. I think the vast majority of adults will have at least one or more ACEs. They've also missed things out from that study, things like perhaps as a child if you were bullied at school. I mentioned trauma in childbirth. Think about the veterans that go to war and the awful trauma that they're going through. That wasn't an exhaustive list, so the chances are probably every single person coming into a clinic today has an adverse childhood event, one or more, that's impacting their health that would need addressing.

Dr. Zielinski: Niki, is it even possible to live today without experiencing an ACE, with this definition?

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Niki: I think if you are a human on this planet it's part of being in the human condition.

Dr. Zielinski: That's what I mean and then you implicate divorce and you domestic violence. I keep on going back to this; everything is relative. What I would consider abuse is not necessarily what my wife would consider abuse. That is something that her and I have actually had a couple points of contention about as we raise our kids. Well, not necessarily abuse, but what's right, what's wrong, and this is not the way I see it.

It goes even deeper. To me, when someone raises their voice to me, it really triggers back when my mother used to yell at me. I consider that abuse, yet my wife, like, "Well, I'm not yelling," I'm like, "Yeah, you are." "I'm not yelling." "Yeah, I am," you know what I mean? How do you tell me no? It's how I feel. This gets really deep. I'm just curious, is there an objective definition of these sorts of concepts? What is exact emotional abuse? What is physical abuse? Is it just relative or do we even have a hard data behind that?

Niki: You know it's a really good question. The definition that I read out of an ACE, you can actually do an inventory of that and you can measure it. You basically get one point for each ACE. It was the list that I read out there about emotional, sexual, and physical abuse, and so on, and incarceration and things like that. Those were just the hardcore ones. Your point is absolutely right. What traumatizes one person may not traumatize another. This is where the individualization needs to come in, personalization, because some people are more sensitive than others.

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Then you start to get into the definition of trauma, because what is trauma? It's usually something that happens that is a shock to the person and they weren't able to process it at the time. Then it gets frozen into their body-mind, if you like, that then causes a chronic imbalance within the emotional body, or it also can translate into the physical illness. It's a really good point. I think that some of the world experts, or the experts who are dealing with trauma, will very much be dealing with each person they see on a case by case basis. They can look at this and say, "Right, you're showing all the signs of trauma by this event" and this event may not have traumatized someone else. That's a really good point.

There's one other really key point I should make here and we talked about this on my summit as well. It's pretty interesting that we're pretty sure that trauma is transgenerational, so it's epigenetically inherited. I've got lots of people who said, "Oh, well, wait a minute, I didn't have of those ACEs in childhood." Well, I say, "Okay, what about mom and dad, or what about your grandparents?" because third generation survivors of the Holocaust showed the same physiological and psychological symptoms as their grandparents.

We've got some incredible studies that are coming out in mice models showing when a fear response is artificially created in association to a smell the offspring inherit the emotional memory. Now we're talking about not just inheriting the physiological impact of stress, but also the potential that we're inheriting the emotional memory. Now we're bringing in the First and Second World War in Europe. You ask anybody, "Were your grandparents impacted by the war," just about everybody in Europe was. Obviously it's

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the history in the US as well. It's huge. There is not one person on this planet I don't think can say they're not affected by an ACE.

Dr. Zielinski: Here's the key take away for me right now; we can listen to this and we could literally fall in a state of hopelessness, even depression, and realize I have no hope. I can't fix this. I'm a victim of my circumstances, yet I know that's not what you stand for. I know that's definitely not what I stand for because, to me, we are not a victim or our circumstances. With that ... you mentioned epigenetics ... we could turn on and off our genetic makeup really at will, depending on our environmental factors or triggers, utilizing natural therapies, mind-body techniques, prayer, meditation. These are so key.

Let's talk about some things right now because the reality is, folks, you listening in, you are not a victim of your circumstances on any level. You're not a victim on any level. Once you realize that, even though someone might have been victimized ... that's a big difference ... you don't need to be a victim. That's a semantic issue we could definitely chat about more if we have time.

What can people do about this specifically, Niki? Let's give some really good take home advice on how they could heal this, how to reverse this ACE cascade through the gut.

Niki: Absolutely, and yeah, there's absolutely loads of things that people can do, which is the great news. Obviously, I probably wouldn't be talking about this if there weren't things that people could do.

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First of all, what we recommended, we need a multi-factorial approach, a multilevel approach. For example, in the case of the gut, you definitely still do need to do all the stuff that you would do to help the gut on the biochemistry level, taking probiotics, dealing with your food sensitivities, if you've got parasites dealing with that. Digestive enzymes, the fermented food side of things, perhaps a low carb diet, all of those great things that we're being really well educated about in all the summits on gut health and so on. You definitely still want to do all that stuff. Also, consider filling out an ACE form or taking a history of your own background. Maybe there isn't something that's on the ACE form but you know it did traumatize you.

The second thing that we want to do is we want to deal with it, any of those traumas that happened, deal with them on the neurological level. That means the great news is ... When I talked about the brain can be hardwired into this kindling that's to do with neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity means the brain can change itself. We can change the brain. We can condition it. We can literally make cells appear and we can make them dissipate. There are things like meditation talk therapy, rest relaxation yoga, breathing acupuncture.

Those things, they're helpful but we did find people who have quite a few ACEs, have chronic complex illness may need to go a little bit deeper. Things like neuro feedback and NLP techniques are found to be great. Literally, you're retraining the brain again. For example, we use these techniques with chronic fatigue and a lot of the autoimmune conditions and gut health. For example, there's a lady called Annie Hopper who does the Dynamic Neural Retraining System. You can actually Google that. You'll find her and she's

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got a whole range of techniques and recommendations specifically to retrain and get rid of those hardwired cells that are causing people to stay in stress. NLP techniques and there is something called EMDR, which is eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. You'll find practitioners online who are doing that work as well. That's also retraining the brain.

A lot of practitioners will try to say, "You could need six months, maybe one hour a day," literally because you're reconditioning. You could have had twenty, thirty, forty years of the old way so it is going to take time to recondition it. It totally works, and we were using this in our clinic working with serious chronic fatigue, and we were getting results within six months. We have been published in the *British Medical journal, Open*, using those techniques as well.

That's one level, the neurological level, and I would recommend looking into that. But I would recommend as well dealing with trauma at the psycho-energetic level as well. That's literally where ... And it's kind of a self enquiry thing. One of the things that happened when we have an ACE in childhood is that it can define and structure our personality. We can actually end up building our core drives around something that happened to us in childhood. For example, somebody, if they were abused or neglected, they might become a super achiever... Or they might become a super helper, or they become a perfectionist because they're so worried about getting something wrong.

There's a particular system that we found really helpful and it's been used a lot and increasingly researched as well, called the Enneagram System. It's

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the nine personality types. It's based on a lot of research and perennial wisdom as well. You can actually go to www.enneagraminstitute.com. You can find your own personality type for free on there just with their free questionnaire. It will literally take you into what are your traits, what are your core drives? You can start to break down how trauma has affected you.

Sometimes awareness itself can break down patterns that we've got stuck in. It will give us clues about who we've become. Yeah, a lot of people get gut problems because they're a driver type, they're an achiever type, and they don't take care of themselves enough. These kind of traumas don't only affect directly through the body, they also affect our behavior, leading to behavioral destructive patterns, whether that's addiction, not looking after ourselves enough, and overworking, burn out, that kind of thing.

Having a look at the personality typing is great. Other things you can do is what I call "infoceuticals," which are things you can take in bottle that can affect your emotions and psychology. Things like homeopathy are a ... Classical homeopathy is actually made to work on that level. Even essential oils have aspects that work on that level, Bach flower remedies, even some botanicals and herbs as well.

The last point I'd make here as well is that emotional trauma, it doesn't just exist in the brain. It's not just neurological. This is the very interesting area and expanding area in the understanding of emotional trauma. It actually gets stored in the body and the body's meridian and energetic systems. It starts to affect muscles, tendons, and bones as well. This is where I think western science is going to continue to show what things like the traditional

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Chinese medicine approaches and so on have shown for centuries, is that we have emotional states. Chronic emotional states do affect particular organs and systems.

In Europe, there's the work of Doctor Hamer, who started something called the German New Medicine. I'm working now with Harry Massey in Peter Fraser's work, which is NES Health and Supercharged, where they can actually scan the energetic body looking for emotional traumas that have occurred. It's very interesting. Things that happen that we might have a traumatic response to are events that we "couldn't digest" or we couldn't swallow, for example. Those kind of traumas therefore get reflected. The consciousness of what happens gets reflected in the body and the organ. If we can't digest something it actually causes a physical block in digestion.

Also, anybody who didn't have enough nurturing, if there was a level of neglect in childhood, lack of self nurture, this can often cause a lack of nourishment and malabsorption issues in the gut. We want to resolve these conflicts of consciousness. The sorts of therapies that you can use are body work therapies for that kind of level, if you like. There's a lot of stuff out there. There's something called Network Spinal Analysis, NSA, which is Dr. Donny Epstein's chiropractic work. Trauma experts these days are using things like breath work, visualization, something called the Rosen Method. If you Google, that's very interesting, very gentle breathing bodywork.

The Emotional Freedom Technique and Thought Field Therapy (TFT), there's many different versions of that type of therapy. They're starting to increase the number of studies showing that they work for trauma. Interestingly,

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Bert Hellinger's Family Constellations Therapy is very useful for this inter-generational trauma. Also Somatic Body Experiencing, the work of Dr. Peter Levine who is a world leading expert on trauma.

The great news is that people are picking up on what's going on with this. It's hugely important for health and there's tons of help out there. If something I might have said might have resonated with you, I'd encourage people to investigate something that they might feel drawn to and trust their own instincts about aligning themselves with something that might work for them.

Dr. Zielinski: Let's help people really take this information because, quite frankly, it could be overwhelming, right?

Niki: Yeah.

Dr. Zielinski: This is the first that you're hearing of these things. I'm listening to you and I have not heard of Bert Hellinger's and Dr Dietrich Klinghardt's work. I'm familiar with NSA and chiropractic. I'm familiar with meditation and I'm familiar with some of the basics, but when it comes to some of the specific ones, what resources would you recommend for people to really dive into this?

Niki: Yes, so if you're looking at some of the energy psychology work, like the Emotional Freedom Technique and Thought Field Therapy, go to energypsych.org, you can find practitioners on there. They've got all those different types of particular therapies. Dr. Peter Levine, if you just Google his name and put "trauma therapy," he's got a couple of great

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books. He was the guy who really got out there and said, “Hey, this trauma, we have fight and flight response, but we also have freeze.” Freeze is where something actually happen where it gets stored into the body. That book, Dr. Peter Levine’s book, it was one of, I would say, the most important books that he wrote, probably in the last twenty years, on the subject. He really explains about trauma and how it works. The book by Dr. Peter Levine is a great one.

Dr. Dietrich Klinghardt is an amazing medical doctor. He is always years ahead of his time. He was talking about emotional trauma being one of the most important things back in 1984. To find his work check out www.klinghardtacademy.com, he’s doing Bert Hellinger’s constellations therapy. He also has something called MFT, which is similar to the Emotional Freedom Technique work that he does. He’s a specialist in Lyme disease, chronic fatigue, Autism, and that spectrum of illnesses. You can go to his website. You’ll see he’s got a huge amount of resources on there as well. He’s a leader in the field on a lot of this kind of emotional trauma type work.

You can actually just Google Family Constellations Therapy and you’ll also find their institute, this is Bert Hellinger’s work, who was a psychoanalyst out of Germany, actually, who then started to work on this energetic level. There are people across the US who are qualified in constellations therapy, so you can find a practitioner fairly easily as well.

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Dr. Zielinski: Niki, you also recommended that people complete an ACE assessment form. Is there a specific website to go to get that, or can they just Google ACE assessment form?

Niki: I can send that out. I can't remember the name of it off the top of my head. We could attach it somewhere to this talk afterwards.

Dr. Zielinski: When I'm online and I just typed up adverse childhood event, ACE assessment form, and I got some things from the CDC. I got some things from the NPR dot org. At least are resources out there, folks, for you.

My last question is this; someone does take the time. They fill out and they take one of these assessment forms, what would be the first step if they find out, okay, there might be an issue here?

Niki: Well, I think the first step is, obviously, it depends on the individual and what kind of issues they have, what symptoms. Obviously, if they're dealing specifically with gut work the next step is looking for the right type of practitioner to work with, depending on the type of issue you have. Step one is just recognizing hey, I have these. Maybe you discovered you had one or more ACE, and just taking some time to actually consider that this has had a major affect on your health for many years.

Which practitioner you would go to, might depend on the type of symptoms that you're experiencing. Actually, any kind of trauma specialist ... Many

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