



# Chiropractic Newsletter

## Well-being

### Early Food Trauma can Affect Our Brain Decades Later?

Shortly before he abandoned our family, one of the last memories I have of my father is an incident at the dinner table. I had just turned 4 years old. My mother had made something that I didn't like, so I didn't eat it. I left it on my plate. "You're not leaving this table until you eat everything on that plate," my father declared. I refused and pushed the plate away. My father pushed it back in front of me. And so it went, for what seemed like hours and hours. My memory is that I finally wore them out and we all went to bed with my plate "unclean." I was promised the same fare for breakfast. Fortunately, in the morning the plate was gone and the incident was not brought up again.



And what was the offending food that I refused to eat?

Spinach.

When I think of how traumatic memories get formed and stored unconsciously in implicit association memory networks in the brain, it begins to make total sense that my body would react adversely to spinach. The triggering cue is the taste along with the setting—dinner at a table. A critical piece that made the experience traumatic for a 4-year-old is the demand that I not leave the table—effectively a demanded, forced "freeze response." Unable to fight or flee, it became the only option available to me at that point. And the freeze response, as we know from polyvagal theory, highly correlates with adverse traumatic experiences.

If I think about all the food allergies I've had over the years—chocolate, milk, strawberries—I can associate traumatic experiences from childhood to each one of them.

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This incident, and similar ones involving early trauma later surfacing due to present-time triggers, have convinced me that much like wounds to the body, early insults to our immature brain networks are constantly attempting to be repaired and restored throughout our adult lives and returned to full integrative functioning. Just as with a cut or a bruise, the keys to an effective healing are a restorative environment and nurturing, understanding relationships.

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