

Why Does the Body Keep the Score?

The phrase "the body keeps the score" refers to how the **physiological and nervous systems hold on to the effects of trauma** long after the traumatic event is over. The body's survival mechanisms, designed for immediate threats, get stuck in a state of high alert, leading to lasting physical and emotional symptoms. It's an involuntary process where the body, rather than the conscious mind, becomes the record keeper of the trauma.

The Neurobiology of a Traumatized Body

The body keeps the score because trauma fundamentally changes the way your brain and nervous system operate. When you're in danger, your brain's **amygdala** (the fear center) goes into overdrive, activating your body's fight-or-flight response. Stress hormones like **adrenaline and cortisol** flood your system, causing your heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension to spike.

Normally, once the threat is gone, your body's parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and digest" system) brings everything back to a calm baseline. However, in the case of trauma, this regulatory system can become impaired. Your body can get "stuck" in a state of hypervigilance, constantly scanning for danger even when you are safe.

This chronic state of arousal can lead to a host of physical problems, including:

Muscle tension and pain: A constant state of readiness can cause chronic back and neck pain, headaches, and jaw tension.

Digestive issues: The body's "fight or flight" response shuts down non-essential functions like digestion, which can lead to irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), ulcers, and other gastrointestinal problems.

Altered immune function: A constant flow of stress hormones can suppress the immune system, making a person more susceptible to illness.

The Role of Physical Sensation in Memory

Traumatic memories are often stored differently than normal memories. The **hippocampus**, which typically organizes memories with a time and place stamp, can be impaired by the high levels of stress hormones. As a result, the memory is not properly filed away as a past event.

Instead, the trauma is stored as fragmented sensory details and physical sensations—a feeling of suffocation, a pounding heart, the smell of smoke, or the sound of a scream. When a person encounters a trigger that resembles any of these sensations, the body responds as if the trauma is happening all over again. This can lead to flashbacks, panic attacks, and a profound feeling of helplessness. The body is literally "replaying" the traumatic event.