

## What is EMDR Therapy?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy is an interactive psychotherapy technique used to relieve psychological stress. It is an effective treatment for trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

During EMDR therapy sessions, you relive traumatic or triggering experiences in brief doses while the therapist directs your eye movements.

EMDR is thought to be effective because recalling distressing events is often less emotionally upsetting when your attention is diverted. This allows you to be exposed to the memories or thoughts without having a strong psychological response. Over time, this technique is believed to lessen the impact that the memories or thoughts have on you.

### The Benefits

People who are dealing with traumatic memories and those who have PTSD are thought to benefit the most from EMDR therapy.

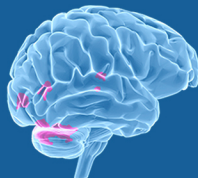
It's thought to be particularly effective for those who struggle to talk about their past experiences.

Although there is not sufficient research to prove its effectiveness in these areas, EMDR therapy is also being used to treat:

- depression
- anxiety
- panic attacks
- eating disorders
- addictions



Brain showing overactivity in red



Same brain after EMDR treatment

## Before you try EMDR therapy

EMDR therapy is considered to be safe, with much fewer side effects than those of prescription medications. That being said, there are some side effects that you may experience.

EMDR therapy causes a heightened awareness of thinking which does not end immediately when a session does. This can cause light-headedness. It can also cause vivid, realistic dreams.

It often takes several sessions to treat PTSD with EMDR therapy. This means that it doesn't work overnight. The beginning of therapy may be exceptionally triggering to people starting to deal with traumatic events, specifically because of the heightened focus. While the therapy will likely be effective in the long run, it may be emotionally stressful to move through the course of treatment.

Talk to your therapist about this when you start treatment so you'll know how to cope if you experience these symptoms.

### The Bottom Line

EMDR therapy has proven to be effective in treating trauma and PTSD. It may also be able to help treat other mental conditions like anxiety, depression, and panic disorders. Some people may prefer this treatment to prescription medications, which can have undesirable side effects. Others may find that EMDR therapy strengthens the effectiveness of their medications.

If you think EMDR therapy is right for you, make an appointment with a licensed therapist.

# EMDR THERAPY



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*Helping individuals of all ages  
discover their strengths to  
work through life's challenges*

# 8 PHASES OF EMDR THERAPY

*Treatment usually takes about 12 separate sessions.*

## PHASE 1

### HISTORY AND TREATMENT PLANNING

Your therapist will first review your history, and decide where you are in the treatment process. This evaluation phase also includes talking about your trauma and identifying potential traumatic memories to treat specifically.

## PHASE 2

### PREPARATION

Your therapist will then help you learn several different ways to cope with the emotional or psychological stress you're experiencing.

Stress management techniques such as deep breathing and mindfulness may be used.

## PHASE 3

### ASSESSMENT

During the third phase of EMDR treatment, your therapist will identify the specific memories that will be targeted and all the associated components (such as the physical sensations that are stimulated when you concentrate on an event) for each target memory.

## PHASE 4-7

### TREATMENT

Your therapist will then begin using EMDR therapy techniques to treat your targeted memories. During these sessions, you will be asked to focus on a negative thought, memory, or image.

Your therapist will simultaneously have you do specific eye movements.

## PHASE 4-7

The bilateral stimulation may also include taps or other movements mixed in, depending on your case.

After the bilateral stimulation, your therapist will ask you to let your mind go blank and notice the thoughts and feelings you're having spontaneously. After you identify these thoughts, your therapist may have you refocus on that traumatic memory, or move on to another.

If you become distressed, your therapist will help bring you back to the present before moving on to another traumatic memory. Over time, the distress over particular thoughts, images, or memories should start to fade.

## PHASE 8

### PROGRESS

In the final phase, you'll be asked to evaluate your progress after these sessions. Your therapist will do the same.

## How Effective is EMDR Treatment?

Multiple independent and controlled studies have shown that EMDR therapy is an effective treatment for PTSD. It's even one of the Department of Veterans Affairs' strongly-recommended options to treat PTSD.

One study of 22 people found that EMDR therapy helped 77 percent of individuals using EMDR therapy to treat PTSD. It found that their hallucinations, delusions, anxiety, and depression symptoms were significantly improved after treatment. The study also found that symptoms were not exacerbated during treatment.

Another study Trusted Source that compared EMDR therapy to typical prolonged exposure therapy, found that EMDR therapy was more

effective in treating symptoms. The study also found that EMDR therapy had a lower dropout rate from participants. Both, however, offered a reduction in the symptoms of traumatic stress, including both anxiety and depression.

Several small studies have also found evidence that EMDR therapy is not only effective in the short-term, but that its effects can be maintained long term. One 2004 study evaluated people several months after they were given either "standard care" (SC) treatment for PTSD or EMDR therapy.

During and immediately after treatment, they noticed that EMDR was significantly more efficient in reducing symptoms of PTSD. During the three-

and six-month follow-ups, they also recognized that participants maintained these benefits long after treatment had ended. Overall, the study found that EMDR therapy gave people a longer-lasting reduction in symptoms than SC.

In regards to depression, one study of 32 people Trusted Source conducted in an inpatient setting found that EMDR therapy shows promise in treating the disorder. The study found that 68 percent of the people in the EMDR group showed full remission after treatment. The EMDR group also showed a stronger decrease in depressive symptoms overall. Because of the small sample size, more research is needed.