

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy

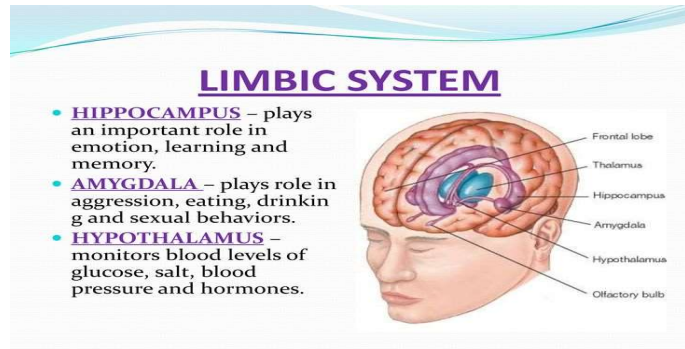
What is EMDR?

The mind can often heal itself naturally, in the same way as the body does. Much of the body's natural coping mechanism occurs during sleep, particularly during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Francine Shapiro developed EMDR in 1987 in order to successfully treat Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Since then, EMDR has been used to effectively treat a wide range of mental health concerns.

What happens when you are traumatized?

Most of the time your body routinely manages new information and experiences without you being aware of it. However, when something out of the ordinary occurs and you are traumatized by an overwhelming event (e.g. a car accident) or by being repeatedly subjected to distress (e.g. childhood neglect), your natural coping mechanisms can become overloaded. This overloading can result in disturbing experiences remaining frozen in your brain or being "unprocessed". Such unprocessed memories and feelings are stored in the limbic system of your brain in a "raw" and emotional form, rather than in a verbal "story" mode. This limbic system maintains traumatic memories in an isolated memory network that is associated with emotions and physical sensations, and which are disconnected from the brain's cortex where we use language to store memories. The limbic system's traumatic memories can be continually triggered when you experience current events similar to the past experiences. Often the memory itself is forgotten, but the painful feelings such as anxiety, panic, anger or despair are continually triggered in the present.

Your ability to live in the present and learn from new experiences can therefore become inhibited. EMDR helps create the connections between your brain's memory networks by enabling your brain to process the traumatic memory in a very natural and healthy way.



What is an EMDR session like?

EMDR utilizes the natural healing ability of your body. After a thorough assessment, you will be asked specific questions about a particular disturbing memory. Eye movements, similar to those during REM sleep, are recreated simply by asking you to watch the clinician's finger moving backwards and forwards across your visual field, or through the use of Thera tappers. The eye movements will last for a short while and then stop. You will then be asked to report back on the experiences you have had during each of these sets of eye movements. Experiences during a session may include changes in thoughts, images and feelings.

With repeated sets of eye movements, the memory tends to change in such a way that it loses its painful intensity and simply becomes a neutral memory of an event in the past. Other associated memories may also heal at the same time. This linking of related memories can lead to a dramatic and rapid improvement in many aspects of your life.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy

What can EMDR be used for today?

In addition to its use for the treatment of PTSD symptoms, EMDR has been successfully used to treat:

- anxiety and panic attacks
- depression
- stress
- phobias
- sleep problems
- complicated grief
- addictions
- pain relief, phantom limb pain (ongoing painful sensations)
- self-esteem and performance anxiety

How long does treatment take?

EMDR can be brief focused treatment or part of a longer psychotherapy intervention. EMDR sessions can range from 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the complexity of the client's symptoms.

Will I remain in control and empowered?

During EMDR treatment, you will remain in control, fully alert and wide-awake. This is not a form of hypnosis and you can stop the process at any time. Throughout the session, the clinician will support and facilitate your own self-healing and intervene as little as possible. Reprocessing is usually experienced as something that happens spontaneously, and new connections and insights are felt to arise quite naturally from within. As a result, most people experience EMDR as being a natural and very empowering therapy.

What evidence is there that EMDR is a successful treatment?

EMDR is an innovative clinical treatment which has successfully helped over a million individuals. The validity and reliability of EMDR has been established by rigorous research. There are now nineteen controlled studies into EMDR making it the most thoroughly researched method used in the treatment of trauma (details on www.emdria.org and www.ptsd.va.gov/) and is recommended by the National Center for PTSD as an effective treatment for trauma symptoms.