

What is EMDR?

The mind can often heal itself naturally, in the same way as the body does. Much of this natural coping mechanism occurs during sleep, particularly during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. Francine Shapiro developed Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) in 1987, utilizing this natural process to successfully treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Since then, EMDR has been used to effectively treat a wide range of mental health problems. EMDR does NOT require a client to provide detailed descriptions or experience extended exposure to memories of the traumatic event.

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 mechanism 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 events like the difficult experiences you have been through. Often the memory itself is long 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, enabling your brain to process the traumatic memory in a very natural 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, like those during REM sleep, will be recreated simply by asking you to watch the therapist's finger moving backwards and forwards across your visual field. Sometimes, a bar of moving lights or headphones is used instead. 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.

What can EMDR be used for?

EMDR is one of the most researched psychotherapeutic approaches for PTSD. Since 1989 over 20 controlled clinical studies have found EMDR to effectively decrease or eliminate the symptoms of PTSD for most clients and it is more efficient.

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) has recently noted EMDR as a Level 1 treatment for PTSD in their published results for 'Evidence-Based Psychological Interventions: A Literature Review' (2018) for both young people and adults. This is the highest rating that can be applied to a specific therapeutic approach. Additional research has focused on use of EMDR for Depression and Anxiety and numerous other issues with extremely good results. The World Health Organization (WHO) also recommends EMDR for clients with PTSD.

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

- Addiction
- Anxiety
- Body dysmorphia
- Complicated grief
- Depression
- Dissociative disorders
- Disturbing memories
- Eating disorders
- Panic attacks
- Pain disorders
- Personality disorders
- Physical abuse
- Self-esteem
- Sleep problems
- Stress
- Sexual abuse

Can anyone benefit from EMDR?

EMDR can accelerate therapy by resolving the impact of your past traumas and allowing you to live more fully in the present. It is not, however, appropriate for everyone. The process is rapid, and any disturbing experiences, if they occur at all, last for a comparatively short period of time. Nevertheless, you need to be aware of, and willing to experience, the strong feelings and disturbing thoughts, which sometimes occur during sessions.

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 therapist 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.

How long does treatment take?

EMDR can be brief focused treatment or part of a longer psychotherapy program. One or more sessions are required for the therapist to understand the nature of the problem and to decide whether EMDR is an appropriate treatment for you. During these initial sessions we will discuss EMDR with you more fully and give you an opportunity to ask questions. Active EMDR sessions are booked for a minimum of 90-minutes while preparation and follow-up sessions can be completed in standard 55-minute sessions.

What will it cost?

To conduct EMDR sessions in Australia psychologists undergo specialized training endorsed by EMDR Australia. Sessions at our clinic vary between \$270(90-minutes) and \$180 (55 minutes). EMDR is an approved focused psychological service by Medicare Australia and session rebates (indexed at \$88.25 as of July 1, 2021) may be available if you have an approved Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP). Additionally, if you have private health insurance, check to see if your fund covers EMDR treatment. Please discuss your specific circumstances with us so we can help you make the best choices for your care.

After EMDR

After EMDR it is normal for your mind to continue processing for 24-48hrs afterwards. Preparation for the immediate period after an EMDR session is completed as part of our planning session(s). You will be trained in appropriate self-soothing skills (emotion regulation, grounding, and relaxation) prior to participating in an EMDR session. Additionally, we encourage you to let supportive others (friends and family) know that you may need extra support if you experience big emotions and thoughts after the session.

Finally, after an EMDR session I will be available via text message (Deb 0484 148 495) for 24-48 hours afterwards. Messages left between 10am-10pm will be responded to within a 2-hour window, messages after this time will be responded to as soon as possible within clinic hours.



Deb Blecha,

MPsych BPsych(Hons) MAPS

Email: Deb@HealingLinks.com.au

Mobile: 0484 148 495