Patient Information on EMDR Therapy

A guide for understanding your treatment

1 EMDR: A Recommended Treatment for Trauma-Related Difficulties

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a treatment method recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), American and British health authorities, and several other international professional organizations as a first-line treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related difficulties. More than 30 research studies show that EMDR is effective for both adults and children.

2 What is EMDR?

EMDR is a treatment method that helps the brain process difficult memories in a natural way. When we experience something traumatic or highly distressing, the memory can become "stuck" in the brain in a way that makes us keep feeling the same anxiety, unease, or pain whenever we think about what happened.

EMDR helps the brain process these memories so that they become less distressing. It is a bit like the way the body heals a wound. The brain has a natural ability to heal itself, but sometimes it needs a little help to get started.

3 How does the treatment work?

During EMDR treatment, the therapist will ask you to think about the difficult memory while you follow the therapist's finger, lightbar or a digital animation with your eyes, moving from side to side. These eye movements are called bilateral stimulation, and they help the brain process the memory in a new way.

Why eye movements? When you follow the therapist's finger from side to side, the brain uses resources from working memory to carry out this task. Since working memory has limited capacity, less capacity remains available to keep the traumatic memory vivid and detailed. This makes the memory less sharp, less emotionally charged, and less distressing. Research shows that eye movements are especially effective at reducing how vivid and distressing memories feel.

4 The eight phases of EMDR

The treatment takes place in eight structured phases:

01	History taking	The therapist gets to know your history and identifies which memories should be processed
02	Preparation	You learn techniques for managing uncomfortable emotions, and the therapist explains how EMDR works
03	Assessment	Together you identify the specific memory and how it affects you today
04	Desensitization	You think about the memory while following the therapist's finger with your eyes
05	Installation	Positive beliefs are linked to the memory
06	Body scan	You check whether any discomfort remains in the body
07	Closure	The therapist makes sure you feel safe before the session ends
08	Reevaluation	Together you evaluate your progress

5 What does the research say?

EMDR is a well-documented treatment method with solid scientific support:

- ✓ More than 30 randomized controlled trials show that EMDR works for PTSD
- ✓ Meta-analyses show significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, depression, anxiety, and subjective distress
- ✓ EMDR works as well as other recommended trauma treatments, but often requires fewer sessions
- ✓ The method is recommended by the WHO, the American VA/DoD, the British NICE, the American Psychiatric Association, and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies
- ✓ EMDR is approved for both adults and children over the age of five

6 What can you expect?

Many people find that their symptoms improve fairly quickly with EMDR. Some notice improvement after just a few sessions, while others need more time. It is normal to feel a little tired or emotionally affected after a session, but this usually passes quickly.

The important thing to know is that even though you have to think about difficult memories during the treatment, the therapist does this in a safe and controlled way. You set the pace yourself, and the therapist will make sure you have tools to manage any uncomfortable emotions that come up.

7 Is EMDR right for you?

EMDR may help if you have experienced:

- ✓ Traumatic events
- ✓ Violence or abuse
- ✓ Accidents
- ✓ Loss or grief
- ✓ Other distressing life events that still trouble you

The therapist will assess whether EMDR is the right treatment for you based on your situation and your needs.

8 Why choose EMDR?

EMDR differs from other forms of treatment in that you do not need to talk in detail about the traumatic event that happened. The treatment focuses on helping the brain process the memory in a natural way, so that it becomes less distressing. Many people find that EMDR produces faster results than other forms of trauma treatment.

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