

# PTSD

## TREATMENT DECISION AID: THE CHOICE IS YOURS

# Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing

### What type of treatment is this?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is one type of trauma-focused psychotherapy for PTSD. EMDR can help you process upsetting memories, thoughts, and feelings related to the trauma. By processing these experiences, you can get relief from PTSD symptoms.

### How does it work?

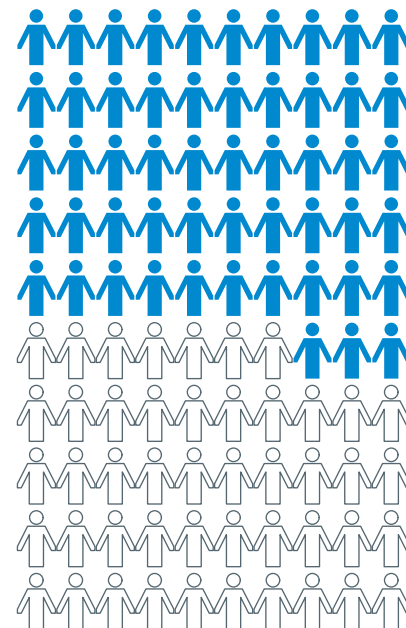
After trauma, people with PTSD often have trouble making sense of what happened to them. EMDR helps you process the trauma, which can allow you to start to heal. In EMDR, you will pay attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound while you call to mind the upsetting memory until shifts occur in the way that you experience that memory and more information from the past is processed. Although EMDR is an effective treatment for PTSD, there is disagreement about how it works. Some research shows that the back and forth movement is an important part of treatment, but other research shows the opposite.

### What can I expect?

During the first stage, you will learn about physical and emotional reactions to trauma. You and your provider will discuss how ready you are to focus on your trauma memories in therapy. To prepare, you will learn some new coping skills.

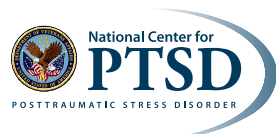
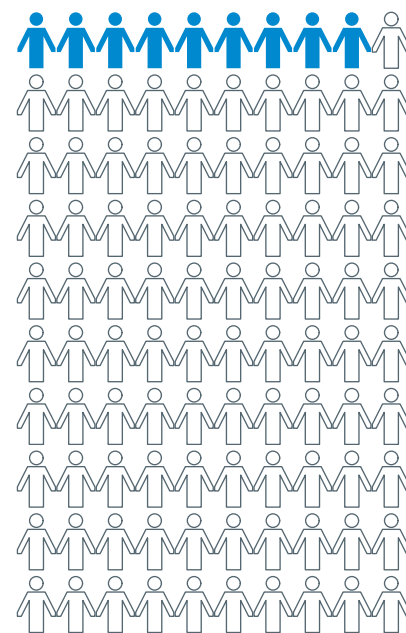
# 53

For every 100 people with PTSD who receive a trauma-focused psychotherapy (such as EMDR), 53 will no longer have PTSD after about three months.



# 9

For every 100 people with PTSD who do not receive PTSD treatment, 9 will no longer have PTSD after about three months.



*The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid is an online tool to help you learn about effective treatments and think about which one might be best for you.*

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[www.ptsd.va.gov/decisionaid](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/decisionaid)

Next, you will identify the “target” — or the upsetting memory you want to focus on — including any negative thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations related to the memory. You will hold the memory in your mind while also paying attention to a back-and-forth movement or sound (like your provider’s moving finger, a flashing light, or a tone that beeps in one ear at a time) until your distress goes down. This will last for about 30 seconds at a time, and then you will talk about what the exercise was like for you. Eventually, you will focus on a positive belief and feeling while you hold the memory in your mind. Towards the end of treatment, your provider will re-assess your symptoms to see if you need to process other targets.

## Is it effective?

Yes, trauma-focused psychotherapy (including Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is one of the most effective types of treatment for PTSD.

## How long does treatment last?

About 1-3 months of weekly 50-90 minute sessions. But, many people start to notice improvement after a few sessions. And the benefits of EMDR can last long after your final session with your provider.

## What are the risks?

You may feel uncomfortable when focusing on trauma-related memories or beliefs. These feelings are usually brief and people tend to feel better as they keep doing EMDR. Most people who complete EMDR find that the benefits outweigh any initial discomfort.

## Will I talk in detail about my trauma?

No, in most cases you will not be asked to talk about the details of your trauma out loud. But you will be asked to think about your trauma in session.

## Group or individual?

EMDR is an individual therapy. You will meet one-to-one with your provider for each session.

## Will I have homework?

No, EMDR does not require you to complete homework or practice assignments between sessions.

## How available is this in VA?

This treatment is not common in VA. It is more widely available outside VA.

## See what Veterans have to say:

“ I felt at one time that it wouldn’t work for me, therapy, you know, psycho babble, BS. But it does work. I liked the eye movements because they were distracting. I was able to get at some of the really deep-seated issues that I hadn’t been able to scratch. ”

Jack Keaton

“ I’ve learned not to be afraid of things that I have no control over. EMDR has given me a clearer way of looking at things about myself that resulted from PTSD. ”

Veteran

“ EMDR has eased my fears – daily things you’re afraid of. I’m much more aware. I’m comfortable with myself now. I notice things and I don’t panic nearly as quickly. When something does bother me, I know why, and it doesn’t bother me nearly as much as it did before. ”

James H.