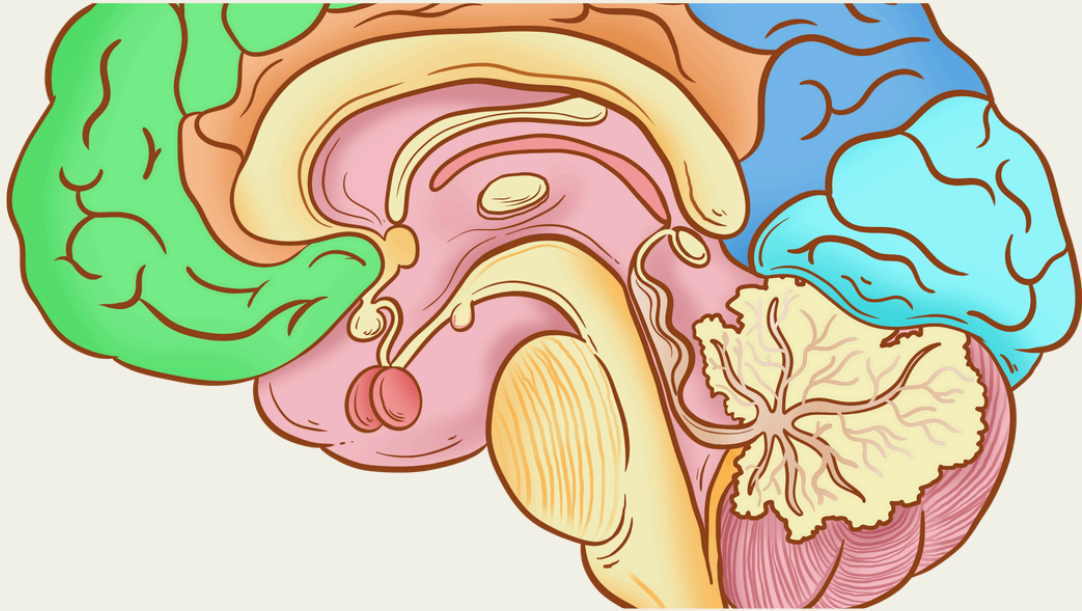


EMDR Therapy - What to Expect

A Path to Healing and Transformation



Welcome to your information pack on EMDR Therapy, a powerful and evidence-based holistic approach to healing trauma and emotional distress.

Inside, you'll find information on the benefits of EMDR, what to expect during your journey toward healing and transformation, and what to avoid immediately after a session. You might also find it helpful to check out more information on EMDR at www.heartoftherapy.com.au/emdr-therapy.

It's natural to feel a bit nervous about starting your EMDR journey. Remember, you're not alone on this journey— we will be there for you every step of the way.

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What EMDR Can Help With

EMDR Therapy is an extensively researched, effective psychotherapy method proven to help people recover from trauma and PTSD symptoms. The research shows that EMDR therapy can also be a helpful treatment for anxiety and panic, depression, OCD, chronic pain, addictions, and other distressing life experiences.

Many psychological issues stem from distressing life experiences that our brains couldn't optimally process. This leads to 'stuck' memories that are easily re-triggered by reminders of the experience, sometimes without us being aware. EMDR Therapy can help process these memories and alleviate the psychological problems they cause.

Some people may find positive changes in a few weeks of EMDR therapy, others in a few months, while others may need longer-term support.

EMDR therapy can be a transformative experience; however, it may not be suitable for everyone. Whether EMDR is the right therapy for a particular individual depends on several factors, and its effectiveness can vary based on the condition and individual circumstances. Your therapist will discuss the suitability of EMDR for you and will be available to answer any questions you have.

"Symptoms occur when trauma and other adverse experiences overwhelm the brain's natural ability to heal.

Using bilateral stimulation, we can unlock the nervous system's healing potential and facilitate the integration and processing of traumatic memories."

~ Francine Shapiro (The creator of EMDR)

What to Expect During Your EMDR Session

EMDR therapy involves eight phases:

1. History Taking
2. Preparation
3. Assessment
4. Desensitisation
5. Installation
6. Body Scan
7. Closure
8. Re-evaluation

Phase 1-3 History taking, preparation and assessment.

- Getting to know you: Your therapist will start by getting to know your history and goals for therapy. They will ask key questions and complete assessments that will help shape your EMDR treatment plan, ensuring it is tailored to your unique circumstances and is safe and maximally beneficial for you.
- Explaining EMDR: Your therapist will explain what EMDR is and how it works, answering any questions you might have.
- Many clients of EMDR worry if they are “doing it right”. It is natural for the instructions to seem strange to follow at first. Try not to worry; your therapist will be there to explain and help you every step of the way.
- Creating a safe space: Together, you'll work on building a safe and trusting therapeutic relationship. This foundation is crucial for effective therapy. If a client doesn't fully trust their therapist, they might not share what they're really feeling or noticing during the eye movements. If they say they feel better to please the therapist, even when they don't, there is no way the EMDR can be effective.
- Relaxation techniques and resource development: Coping strategies and relaxation techniques are developed to help manage distress that may arise during the process. Other resources, like an imaginary team of nurturing, protective and wise figures, are used to facilitate the healing process.

- **Pets welcome** – In telehealth sessions, some clients bring their pets or other items for added comfort and grounding, which we welcome.
- **You are in control of the process.** At any time, you have the choice to stop the process by asking or gesturing to stop.
- **Choice of protocol:** Various adaptations and specialised approaches of EMDR have been developed to address different needs. Your therapist will choose an EMDR protocol that fits your specific circumstances and tailor it especially for you. Every course of EMDR treatment can, therefore, vary slightly or significantly depending on various factors.
- **Identifying Targets:** Using your therapy goals as a guide, you and your therapist will identify specific memories, thoughts, or experiences to target in your sessions.
- **You don't need to tell us:** In EMDR if the person seeking treatment doesn't want to, they don't have to discuss their disturbing memories in detail. While some may prefer to share specifics, others can give a general outline. For example, when asked about an event, someone might say, "It was something my brother did." That's enough for the therapist to target the event with EMDR.
- **Negative and positive beliefs:** Your therapist will help you to identify a negative self-belief you hold about yourself associated with the target. Eg. "I am helpless/worthless/unlovable/ dirty/bad/responsible/ in danger." etc. A positive belief you would much rather believe is also identified. Eg. "I am worthwhile/lovable/a good person/okay/safe now."

Phases 4-6 Desensitisation, installation, body scan.

- **Bilateral Stimulation:** During this phase, your therapist will guide you through bilateral stimulation. This could involve following their hand movements with your eyes, listening to alternating tones through headphones, or tapping on an area of your body.
- **Focusing on the Memory:** You'll be asked to focus on the distressing memory while the bilateral stimulation occurs. Your therapist will guide you to do it with 'dual awareness', which helps you to process a memory from the past while staying connected to the safety of the present moment. This process allows your brain to reprocess the memory, reducing its emotional impact.
- **Noticing thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories:** As you focus on the memory and engage in bilateral stimulation, other memories, strong feelings, and thoughts will likely come up. This is a normal part of the process. Your therapist will support you in noticing what comes up without trying to control it.
- **With repeated sets of bilateral stimulation, the memory tends to change,** losing its painful intensity and becoming a neutral memory of an event in the past. Other related memories may also heal, leading to quick and significant improvements in many areas of your life.

- The negative belief loses its grip: Once the relevant memories are processed to completion, your negative belief about yourself related to the memory won't feel as true anymore. Further targeted bilateral stimulation can assist in clearing out anything that keeps these negative beliefs feeling true.
- A new positive belief takes hold: A new positive belief related to the memory is now worked with. Positive self-beliefs are important, but they have to be believed on more than just an intellectual level to create change. Bilateral stimulation is used to reinforce this positive belief and ensures nothing stops it from really feeling true. "I am powerless" or "I am in danger" might be replaced with "I am safe now," or "I am not good enough" might become "I am okay the way I am."



- **Releasing trauma from the body:** You'll be asked to focus on your body and notice any lingering physical sensations associated with the memory. This helps ensure that the memory has been fully processed out of the body as well as the mind. If any tension or discomfort remains, additional bilateral stimulation may help release it.
- **Past, Present and Future:** Once the past has been processed, present-day situations that cause distress are targeted, along with potential future scenarios, to strengthen your ability to approach these situations with confidence and calm in the future.

Phases 7-8. Closing a session and e-evaluation

- If the processing of the traumatic target event is not complete in a single session the therapist will assist you using various techniques to contain the memory until it can be worked on again. You will be briefed on what to expect between sessions, how to use a journal to record these experiences, and what techniques could be used to self-soothe outside of the therapy session.
- The primary purpose of this phase is to ensure that the memory has been fully processed and that no residual distress remains. It helps in avoiding incomplete processing, which could lead to continued symptoms. Future targets and directions for continued treatment are determined.

What to Expect After an EMDR session

What you might experience in the hours and days following an EMDR Therapy session.

- **Relief:** Some people feel a sense of relief or lightness immediately after a session, as if a weight has been lifted.
- **Fatigue:** EMDR can be tiring, however, and so it is possible you may feel tired or drained in the hours and days after a session. Try to give yourself permission to take it as easy as possible and rest as much as possible during this time.
- **New insights:** You may gain new insights or perspectives about your trauma or other issues. This could manifest as a shift in how you perceive certain events or relationships.
- **Increased emotions, sensitivity and reactivity:** It is believed your brain continues to process 72 hours after the EMDR session or more. During this period, you may find yourself more sensitive and reactive than usual. You may experience a range of emotions, including sadness, anger, or anxiety. Many people don't, but it is good to be prepared and, if appropriate, prepare the people around you in case you do. If anything arises that feels unmanageable, your therapist will be available to contact.

- Grief – As traumatic memories are processed through the EMDR process, you may experience grief and loss for what you endured, missed, or had to give up. Emotional pain, including deep sadness and anger associated with grief and loss, is possible. This grief is a natural part of the healing process, and although it can feel deeply painful, experiencing it during EMDR Therapy is a positive sign that you are making progress and healing.
- Try to be patient with yourself and allow any emotions to come and go without judgment and with extra self-care. Allowing yourself to experience and express grief, whether through talking, crying, journaling, movement, or ritual, is crucial for emotional healing and overall well-being.
- Increased awareness: EMDR can bring buried memories to the surface. Some clients report increased awareness of previously forgotten details of events or specific thoughts or feelings in the hours or days following a session.
- Tension and other somatic symptoms: As your body releases stored stress, you might experience physical tension or slight discomfort.
- Behavioural Shifts: You might notice positive changes in your behaviour, such as improved coping mechanisms or positively altered responses to triggers.
- Dreams and Memories: You might have vivid dreams or memories related to the session. This is a positive sign because it indicates that your brain is continuing to process the material from the session.

What to Avoid Following an EMDR Session



- **Alcohol:** After an EMDR session, your brain continues to process the memories and emotions you worked on up until 72 hours after the process. Alcohol and some drugs can interfere with this natural processing and integration, potentially hindering the effectiveness of the therapy.
- **Neglecting Self-Care:** Try not to skip your emotional, mental, and physical self-care routines in the day following an EMDR session. Making time for relaxing and grounding activities, such as gentle exercise, mindfulness, or time in nature, gives your nervous system the essential support it needs. We have included lots of self-care tips and reminders for you further along in this care package.

- **Forgetting to complete your post-session EMDR log:** Your therapist will give you a post-session log to complete between sessions, and it might be tempting not to prioritise it. The log helps you and your therapist track how the therapy is working for you, identify patterns or triggers that may still need to be addressed, and enhance your self-awareness and understanding of your emotions and thoughts.
- **High-Stress Environments:** In the day or two following an EMDR session try to avoid situations that are likely to cause significant stress or emotional strain, such as intense social interactions, conflicts or overly-stimulating situations.
- **Difficult Conversations:** Consider postponing any potentially difficult or emotionally charged conversations until you feel more settled and grounded.
- **Important Decisions:** Avoid making major life decisions immediately after a session; give the process time to settle first.
- **Complex Tasks:** Immediately following an EMDR session consider postponing complex tasks or decision-making processes that require a lot of mental energy and focus.
- **Overloading Your Schedule:** Try to avoid overloading your schedule with too many activities or commitments. Give yourself space to rest and process the session, and allow your mind and body to recover and integrate the therapeutic work.
- **Driving:** We recommend avoiding driving immediately following your first EMDR processing session. Take some time following every session to ensure you are grounded enough to drive safely.

Reaching Out For Support

When navigating the journey of trauma healing, it's important to remember that you don't have to go it alone. Reaching out for support—whether from a trusted friend, family, a support group, or a helpline—can provide guidance, comfort, and perspective.

If anything arises between EMDR Therapy appointments that feels unmanageable for you, it is important to let your therapist know. Your therapist will give you instructions for contacting them between sessions if the need arises during an EMDR course of treatment.

For immediate emotional or mental health support, the following services are available (most are available 24 hrs, 7 days, and via phone and web chat)

- Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467
- 1800 Respect – 1800 737 732
- Blue Knot Helpline – 1300 657 380
- Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800
- Mensline – 1300 789 978
- Qlife – 1800 184 527
- Emergency – 000, or contact your local mental health crisis support team by calling your local hospital.