

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q. What can I do to get ready for EMDR?

A: You don't need to do anything. Just go in with an open mind. You can even work on traumas without sharing all the details, if you are honest with your therapist about what's going on during the imaginal exposure and narrative. Your therapist will help to understand how the treatment works and answer any questions.

### Q: Does EMDR work with multiple traumas?

A: Yes. Service members who have experienced multiple traumas can experience improvements with EMDR. Key traumas that you work on in therapy will generalize to other related events, so symptoms related to other traumas improve even if you don't discuss them in session.

### Q: Will I be able to handle doing EMDR?

A: It is common for individuals with PTSD to have this concern. Your therapist will teach you skills to help you feel ready to confront the things you want to change. Nevertheless, it is important to talk to your provider if you have these concerns.

### Q: Who can benefit from EMDR?

A: EMDR has worked for a variety of individuals with different backgrounds and traumas. Because the processing continues outside of therapy, you may feel more tired or stressed during EMDR, so it works best if you're willing to practice your new skills between sessions.

## Who We Are

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences' Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP) trains military and civilian behavioral health professionals to provide high quality, culturally-sensitive, evidence-based behavioral health services to Service members, Veterans and their families.



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Angelita M. Lawrence.  
<https://archive.defense.gov/photoessays/PhotoEssaySS.aspx?ID=1748>

# Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy

## What is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy?

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy is one of the therapies recommended by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). EMDR requires approximately 4-12 sessions delivered individually. Sessions are typically 60-90 minutes in length.

In EMDR, you focus on watching hand movements or a light bar, listening to alternating sounds, or tapping, while you talk or even just think about the traumatic event. Treatment is based on the idea that rapid eye movements make it easier for our brains to work through the traumatic memories. Focusing on hand movements or sounds while you talk about the traumatic event may help change how you react to memories of your trauma over time. Over the course of treatment, you will also learn skills to help you relax and handle emotional distress.

Over time, people who try EMDR frequently find they can remember their trauma without feeling so upset by it.



### EMDR is a short-term psychotherapy for treating symptoms of PTSD, which may include:

- Reliving or re-experiencing the event through distressing thoughts, nightmares, and flashbacks
- Avoiding thoughts and reminders of the event
- Negative changes in beliefs and feelings, such as anger and irritability
- Feeling keyed up, which may lead to problems sleeping and concentrating as well as being easily startled

### What Are the Goals of EMDR?

The primary goal of EMDR is to help you access and process traumatic memories and bring them to an “adaptive resolution,” or without the negative thoughts, feelings, or physical arousal.

In EMDR you can plan to leave every session feeling calm (though you may be tired). If this is hard for you, your therapist can help you build those skills first.

### What Will I Be Doing in EMDR?

EMDR has four main parts:

- Identification of a target memory, image, unhelpful belief about the trauma, and level of distress
- Desensitization and reprocessing: focusing on eye movements or other bilateral stimulation, while noticing mental images, thoughts, or emotions as they come up
- Enhancing positive, helpful thoughts about yourself and your experiences once the painful ones are no longer distressing
- Body scan: focusing on tension or unusual sensations in the body, to identify additional issues you may need to address in later sessions