

EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION & REPROCESSING (EMDR)

Information for patients. Please read this carefully.

EMDR helps people with trauma memories, disturbing experiences, stress and anxiety. The EMDR therapist will need to know four things about your problem.

1. The flashback or image.
2. The distressing thoughts that come with the flashback.
3. The physical feelings that go with the flashback.
4. The therapist will ask you to measure how distressed you feel. An imaginary ruler from zero to ten is used. Zero means that you feel OK about it. Ten means you are as distressed as you can be.

Talking about bad memories can be distressing. The therapist only needs to know the first flashback to start the treatment. EMDR is best done in a business like and clinical fashion, to get you through the procedure. You may not remember part of the trauma and the therapist will discuss this with you.

The therapist will ask you to think about the flashback. At the same time, you will track his/her hand (or a stick) so your eyes move from side to side. The therapist will do this in sets of about 25 movements. If you find this distressing and difficult at first, it should get easier. Other methods are available if there is a problem moving your eyes.

At the end of each set, please blank out the flashback and take a deep breath. Then report any changes in the flashback and the distress number.

Usually what happens is that the image becomes misty or foggy and then should appear to get further away from you. It may become like something you saw in a film. Next it will feel like the flashback is difficult to concentrate on. At the end, they can remember what happened but without distress. On average, this takes about 15 sets per flashback.

At some point, the next flashback will come to your attention. Tell the therapist even if it is difficult or embarrassing. All flashbacks you report should be treated with EMDR. The average number of flashbacks is seven. The average number of treatment sessions is three.

Sometimes people do not want to lose the flashback completely. For example, the patient may want to remember somebody who died in an accident. If you want to keep part of the image, but at a level less distressing, let the therapist know when you want to stop.

The result of EMDR is permanent as far as we know. There are two exceptions. The flashbacks may return if the patient is reminded, with enough force, of the bad things that have happened. An example of this is when a woman returns to the man who assaulted her. The second exception is if the patient does not tell the therapist about all the flashbacks, or bad things that have happened.

There are three possible problems during treatment.

1. It can be slow to start in the first two or three sets. You may feel a bit strange at first, until you understand what is happening.
2. Sometimes the flashback and the distressing thought will not make sense together. If this happens the therapist will ask, 'What are you now telling yourself?' and then carry on with this new thought.
3. Sometimes people remember something else distressing. They may feel the pain or sensations from painful medical treatment or physical or sexual assault. This is upsetting, but usually only lasts a few minutes at its worst. This means the EMDR has reached the most important part of the memory. You must then continue EMDR on the new flashback. You should agree before the treatment starts that if this happens, you will continue EMDR.

After the session, please remember five things.

1. You may feel light-headed and tired afterwards. You may not feel like going back to work. A few patients have reported headaches. If this happens, do whatever you usually do with headaches.
2. Treating bad memories does not mean that your problem was trivial or imagined.
3. When treatment works you can expect improvements. Until the EMDR is finished, any improvement after one session may reverse. You may remember other bad memories. If this happens, report them back to the therapist for further treatment.

4. If you have panic attacks, you may have a panic between sessions. You may become anxious that you will have another panic attack. Tell the therapist this is happening. Solving this problem may require several appointments close together.
5. Do not drive a car for 30 minutes after the finish of the treatment. You may need to allow for this in your travel arrangements.

Attending Appointments

About half the people who start EMDR do not finish. Some drop out before treatment starts. Others drop out after some successful sessions, perhaps thinking they have finished. Treatment is not finished until the therapist has checked that all flashbacks have been treated successfully. Unfinished treatment may result in continuing problems. If you change your mind about EMDR do not miss the appointment. Attend and discuss any doubts or other methods. Patients who miss appointments without notice lose the appointment themselves, and stop us giving it to somebody who needs it. This means two people lose a treatment time. If you do not want an appointment, phone in cancel it as soon as you decide. This leaflet can be printed in large print or can be made available in other formats and languages.

If you need to change an appointment please ring 01752 431124

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