



Eye Movement Desensitization Response

How was EMDR Developed?

In 1987, psychologist Dr. Francine Shapiro made the chance observation that eye movements can reduce the intensity of disturbing thoughts under certain conditions. Dr. Shapiro studied this effect scientifically, and, in 1989, she reported success using EMDR to treat victims of trauma in the Journal of Traumatic Stress. Since then EMDR has developed and evolved through the contributions of therapists and researchers all over the world. Today, EMDR is a set of protocols that incorporate elements from many different treatment approaches.

How Does EMDR Work?

No one knows exactly how EMDR works. However, we do know that when a person is very upset, their brain cannot process information as it does ordinarily. One moment becomes “frozen in time,” and remembering a trauma may feel as bad as going through it the first time because the images, sounds, smells and feelings haven’t changed. Such memories have a lasting negative effect on the way a person sees the world and relates to other people that interferes with his or her life.

EMDR seems to have a direct effect on the way that the brain functions. Normal information processing is resumed, so, following a successful EMDR session, the images, sounds and feelings no longer are relived when the event is brought to mind. What happened is still remembered, but it is less upsetting. Many types of therapy have similar goals. However, EMDR appears to be similar to what occurs naturally during dreaming or REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Therefore, EMDR can be thought of as physiologically based therapy that helps a person see disturbing material in a new and less distressing way.

But Does EMDR Really Work?

A number of scientific studies have shown that EMDR is effective. For example, the prestigious Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology published research by Wilson, Becker and Tinker in December 1995. This study of 80 subjects with post-traumatic stress demonstrated that clients improved significantly with EMDR treatment, and further study showed that this beneficial effect was maintained for at least 15 months. The findings from this and other studies indicate that EMDR is highly effective and that results are long lasting. For further references, a bibliography of research on EMDR may be obtained through EMDRIA.

What is the Actual EMDR Session Like?

During the EMDR session, the therapist works with the client to identify a specific problem to be the focus of a treatment sessions. The client calls to mind the disturbing issue or event, what was seen, felt, heard, though, etc., and what thoughts and beliefs currently are held about that event. The therapist facilitates by directional movement of the eyes or other bilateral stimulations of the brain while the client focuses on the disturbing material and the client just notices whatever comes to mind without making any effort to control direction or content. Each person will process information uniquely, based on personal experiences and values. It is important to understand that there is no way for the client to do EMDR incorrectly! Sets of eye movements are continued until the memory becomes less disturbing and is associated with positive thoughts and beliefs about one's self; for example, "I did the best I could." During EMDR the client may experience intense emotions, but by the end of the session most people report a great reduction in the level of disturbance.

How Long Does EMDR Take?

One or more sessions are required for the therapist to understand the nature of the problem and to decide whether EMDR is an appropriate treatment. The therapist will also discuss EMDR more fully and provide an opportunity to answer any questions about the method. Once therapist and client have agreed that EMDR is appropriate for a specific problem, the actual EMDR therapy can begin.

A typical EMDR session lasts about 90 minutes. The type of problems, life circumstances and the amount of previous trauma will determine how many treatment sessions are necessary. A single session of EMDR is sufficient in some cases. However, a typical course of treatment is 3 to 10 sessions performed weekly, or every other week. EMDR may be used within a standard "talking" therapy, as an adjunctive therapy with a separate therapist, or as a treatment all by itself.

What Kind Of Problems can EMDR Treat?

Scientific research has established EMDR as effective for post traumatic stress. However, clinicians have reported success using EMDR in treatment of the following conditions::

- * phobias
- * panic attacks
- * addictions
- * dissociative disorders
- * disturbing memories
- * anxiety disorder
- *performance anxiety
- *stress reduction
- *complicated grief
- *sexual and/or physical abuse

Does Insurance Cover EMDR?

If your policy covers standard psychotherapy, it most likely will cover EMDR. Currently, the EMDR International Association is working towards establishing a specific EMDR code for insurance reimbursement.