

## What is EMDR Therapy?

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) Therapy is a psychological treatment highly effective in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as other psychological conditions.

EMDR Therapy is based on the idea that negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours stem from unprocessed memories from stressful or traumatic experiences. EMDR Therapy is a structured treatment that involves focusing simultaneously on a) an upsetting issue or traumatic memory and its associated thoughts, feelings and sensations, and b) bilateral stimulation that is most commonly in the form of repeated eye movements. This is believed to mimic the natural memory processing characteristics of REM sleep and disrupt working memory, thus facilitating the brain to successfully process a memory or issue. Once traumatic memories have been desensitized and reprocessed, they no longer have the same negative impact. Memories typically become less vivid and upsetting, intrusive symptoms such as nightmares and flashbacks reduce or cease, and more adaptive beliefs emerge.

## How effective is EMDR Therapy?

EMDR Therapy is one of the most well researched trauma treatment models and has been shown to be effective in over 25 scientific studies and numerous independent reviews. It is endorsed by:

- The World Health Organisation (2013)
- The Australian Psychological Society (2010)
- The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (2009)
- American Psychiatric Association (2004).

## The EMDR Program at The Melbourne Clinic

Clients are admitted to the EMDR Program for a 4-week admission. There are individual and group treatment components in the program. Patients see their EMDR Therapist for two 90-minute sessions each week, so a total of 8 EMDR sessions per admission. Patients also attend daily group therapy sessions, Monday to Friday.

EMDR is an 8-phase model of treatment that involves assessment and preparation prior to the commencement of trauma processing. This means that each person's first EMDR admission will be different, as the EMDR Therapist will tailor the early stages of therapy to suit the individual client. The pace of treatment depends on the complexity of the client's trauma history, their existing resources and emotional regulation skills, and their broader life circumstances.

Some clients may only require a single EMDR admission. However, it is not unusual for clients to require 2-3 admissions to the EMDR program, with breaks of a number of months in between. For some clients, memory processing using eye movements will commence in the second or third EMDR session, while for others it may not commence until their second or third admission.

## Typically, the early stages of EMDR Therapy will include:

- A psychological assessment (although this is often conducted at an earlier time)
- Education about the process of EMDR Therapy
- Development of emotional regulation strategies
- Identification of the main traumatic memories to target
- An exploration of the different 'parts' of the client's personality
- The beginning phases of memory processing

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## What happens during an EMDR Therapy session?

Once adequate preparation has taken place, memory processing becomes the focus of EMDR treatment. The client is invited to think about a particular disturbing issue or event, and notice what images, thoughts, feelings and sensations arise. The therapist then guides the client to move their eyes left and right, or uses another form of bilateral stimulation such as sounds or taps. The bilateral stimulation is repeated in sets throughout the session, with pauses and brief reflection in between. This process continues until the target issue or memory becomes less disturbing and adaptive insights emerge. The EMDR Therapist will allow time to debrief the session, and often the session will conclude with some form of grounding or relaxation exercise. The client is fully awake, alert and in control at all times during an EMDR session.

## What does the group programme involve?

In addition to the twice weekly individual EMDR therapy sessions, clients attend daily group therapy sessions, Monday to Friday. These group sessions are holistic and trauma-informed. The group component of the EMDR program is a great way to increase support and solidarity among patients who are undergoing EMDR treatment. A variety of group topics are offered, some of which are educational in nature, such as 'Managing nightmares and flashbacks' and 'Understanding PTSD and the impact of trauma'. Other group sessions are experiential, for example, daily walks, mindful movement, art therapy and music therapy.

In between EMDR sessions clients are also invited, if they feel able, to facilitate their trauma processing by journaling about new insights, engaging in artwork/ drawing and talking to clinical staff.

## Prior to each EMDR admission

Clients attend a 60-minute outpatient pre-admission appointment at The Melbourne Clinic prior to their EMDR admission. During this appointment they are given an EMDR pre-admission workbook, which they are required to complete in the two weeks prior to their admission to the EMDR program. Admission to Day Programs and Outreach services are postponed in this time to allow for accurate monitoring of the client's functioning and symptoms in the community, whilst also allowing time to prepare for their EMDR admission.

## Who could benefit from EMDR Therapy?

While EMDR Therapy was originally developed for PTSD, research is continuing to support its application to a range of other psychological issues, including:

- Anxiety
- Phobias
- Personality disorders
- Chronic pain
- Panic attacks
- Depression
- Complicated grief
- Eating disorders.

## Referral process

All referrals are directed to The Melbourne Clinic intake, who will triage the referral.

**Any questions regarding this program can be directed to:**

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