

Can EMDR Help With Depression?

What research suggests about depression, major depression, and persistent depression

EMDR Guide Series



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Short answer: Yes, EMDR may help some people with depression, especially when painful memories, trauma, loss, or negative beliefs are part of the pattern.

Depressive symptoms



Research shows EMDR can reduce depressive symptoms in some people.

Promising evidence

Major Depressive Disorder



Studies suggest EMDR may help with major depression. The evidence base is smaller than for PTSD.

Promising, still developing

Persistent Depressive Disorder



EMDR may also help long-term or chronic depression, but the evidence is thinner and still growing.

More limited evidence

Why might EMDR help?



Targets painful memories



Loosens stuck negative beliefs



Includes emotions and body sensations



Works with distressing memories

What depression-related beliefs might show up?

“I’m not good enough.”

“I’m a failure.”

“I’m unlovable.”

“Nothing will ever change.”



Important to remember

- EMDR is not a one-size-fits-all treatment.
- It is not the only therapy for depression.
- Assessment and preparation matter.
- The best plan depends on the person.

A good question to ask



Are painful memories, losses, or negative beliefs part of my depression?”

Curiosity today. Progress tomorrow.

Selected references

1. Carletto et al. (2021). European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 12(1), 1894736. DOI: 10.1080/20008198.2021.1894736
2. Dominguez, Matthijssen & Lee (2021). PLOS ONE, 16(7), e0254778. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0254778
3. Yan et al. (2021). Frontiers in Psychiatry, 12, 700458. DOI: 10.3389/fpsy.2021.700458