



EMDR THERAPY IN THE TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION

By Arne Hofmann M.D., and Maria Lehnung Ph.D.

Depression is one of the most common psychological disorders in the U.S. Each year 17.3 million people suffer from a major depressive episode. This number represents 7.1 percent of all U.S. adults. Depression can cause people to suffer greatly and function poorly at work, at school, and in the family. In adolescents (18-25 yrs.) 13 percent suffer from depression (SAMSA, 2017). This problem has grown significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Depressive disorders show a great deal of variability. Whether depressive symptoms have disappeared completely (complete remission) plays an essential role in the further development of the illness. Residual depressive symptoms represent one of the strongest risk factors for a depressive relapse (Nierenberg et al. 2003). It is recognized that the risk for a depressive relapse—in the case of an incomplete remission of the

depressive disorder—is about five times higher than for a patient with complete remission. On average, the expected probability of a full remission two years after completing a successful treatment of a depressive disorder is about 40-50 percent (de Jong-Meyer et al. 2007).

Internationally, experts calculate that only about 25 percent of depressive patients suffer from a single depressive episode. Seventy-five percent of patients suffer from repeated episodes, depending on the length of observation. For about 20 percent of patients, the illness becomes chronic. So for the vast majority of depressive patients, it can be assumed that the illness is either chronic or reoccurs in depressive episodes.

The most frequently used forms of treatment are medication, psychotherapeutic treatment, and a combination of medication and psychotherapeutic treatment. Additional therapeutic

processes often used supplementally—in combination with the forms of therapy named above—include light therapy, wake therapy, sports, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), and transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). All of these therapeutic options have improved the treatment of depressive illnesses.

However, many patients suffer from relapses and chronicities, so an increasing number of researchers are searching for new approaches to understanding and treating depressive disorders.

The study results laid out in this article lead to two conclusions:

1. EMDR therapy for primary depression is at least equivalent in its effectiveness as current guideline-based psychotherapy for depression, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).
2. There are studies that show EMDR therapy may result in a