

How Does Somatic Processing Work With EMDR?

Somatic processing is integral to EMDR because trauma isn't just stored in the mind as a memory; it's also held in the body as physical sensations. By intentionally focusing on these bodily sensations, EMDR helps to release the "stuck" trauma energy and allows the brain to fully process and integrate the memory. Without addressing the body, the healing process is often incomplete, as the physical symptoms of trauma, like tension, pain, or a feeling of being "on edge," can persist even after the emotional distress has been reduced.

Why the Body Holds Trauma

When a traumatic event occurs, the body's survival response (fight, flight, or freeze) is activated. If the person can't complete the full response—for instance, a trapped animal can't flee—that survival energy can become trapped in the nervous system. This can lead to a state of chronic dysregulation, manifesting as physical symptoms like:

Muscle Tension: Often in the neck, shoulders, and jaw.

Digestive Issues: Stomach churning or a feeling of a "knot" in the stomach.

Altered Breathing Patterns: Shallow or constricted breathing.

Sensory Issues: Numbness, tingling, or a feeling of being disconnected from one's body.

These body sensations are not just side effects of trauma; they are the trauma itself being held in the nervous system. The brain's memory of the event and the body's physical experience of it are deeply intertwined.

The Role of Somatic Processing in EMDR

Somatic processing in EMDR works by intentionally bringing awareness to these physical sensations during the reprocessing phase. A trained therapist will guide you through this process, which typically involves these key steps:

Identification: The client identifies the target memory and the associated negative belief, emotion, and most importantly, the **body sensation** that comes with it. This sensation is a crucial entry point for the healing work. For example, a person might describe feeling a "tightness in their chest" or a "knot in their stomach."

Tracking: As the bilateral stimulation (eye movements, taps, or tones) begins, the client is encouraged to notice any changes in these body sensations. The therapist will periodically check in, asking, "What are you noticing now?"

Resolution: As the memory is reprocessed, the emotional intensity and the associated body sensations

should gradually decrease. The goal is to reach a point where the memory can be recalled without any physical distress. The client may experience a "release" in the body, such as a deep breath, a relaxing of muscles, or a feeling of warmth, indicating that the stored trauma energy is dissipating.

By integrating somatic processing, EMDR addresses trauma holistically, recognizing that true healing requires the brain and body to work together to fully resolve the experience.