

PTSD

TREATMENT DECISION AID: THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Prolonged Exposure

What type of treatment is this?

Prolonged Exposure (PE) is one type of trauma-focused psychotherapy for PTSD. PE teaches you to gradually approach trauma-related memories, feelings, and situations that you have been avoiding since your trauma. By confronting these challenges, you can actually decrease your PTSD symptoms.

How does it work?

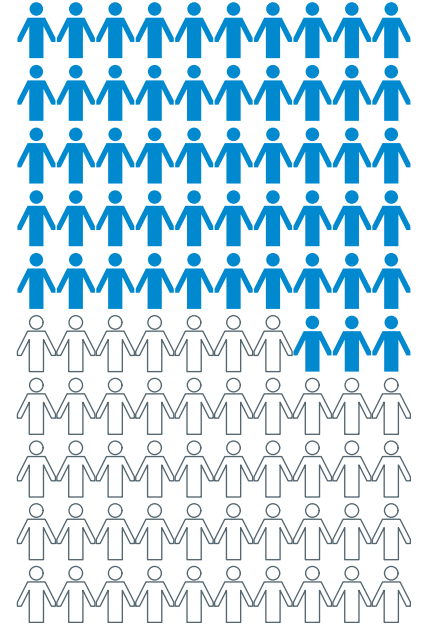
People with PTSD often try to avoid anything that reminds them of the trauma. This can help you feel better in the moment, but not in the long term. Avoiding these feelings and situations actually keeps you from recovering from PTSD. PE works by helping you face your fears. By talking about the details of the trauma and by confronting safe situations that you have been avoiding, you can decrease your PTSD symptoms and regain more control of your life.

What can I expect?

Your provider will start by giving you an overview of treatment and getting to know more about your past experiences. You will also learn a breathing technique to help you manage anxiety. Around your second session, you will work with your provider to make a list of people, places, or activities that you have stayed away from since your trauma. Over the course of therapy, you will work through your list step-by-step, practicing in vivo exposure.

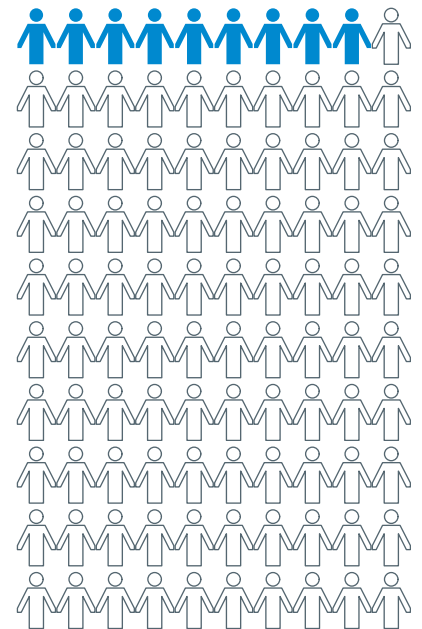
53

For every 100 people with PTSD who receive a trauma-focused psychotherapy (such as PE), 53 will no longer have PTSD after about three months.



9

For every 100 people with PTSD who do not receive PTSD treatment, 9 will no longer have PTSD after about three months.



The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid is an online tool to help you learn about effective treatments and think about which one might be best for you.

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www.ptsd.va.gov/decisionaid

This means that you will gradually confront these situations. With time, you will find that you can feel comfortable in these situations — and you will not need to avoid them anymore. After a few sessions, you will begin to talk through the details of your trauma with your provider. This is called imaginal exposure. Talking about the trauma can help with emotions like fear, anger, and sadness. You will listen to recordings of your imaginal exposure between sessions. By confronting the details of the trauma in therapy, you will find that you have fewer unwanted memories at other times.

Is it effective?

Yes, trauma-focused psychotherapy (including Prolonged Exposure) is one of the most effective types of treatment for PTSD.

How long does treatment last?

PE usually takes 8-15 weekly sessions, so treatment lasts about 3 months. Sessions are 1.5 hours each. You may start to feel better after a few sessions. And the benefits of PE often last long after your final session with your provider.

What are the risks?

The risks of doing PE are mild to moderate discomfort when engaging in new activities and when talking about trauma related memories. These feelings are usually brief and people tend to feel better as they keep doing PE. There is also a slight risk that someone could listen to a therapy session without your permission if the recording was not secure. You and your provider can discuss ways to secure your personal information related to this program. Most people who complete PE find that the benefits outweigh any initial discomfort.

Will I talk in detail about my trauma?

Yes, around your 3rd session, you will start talking in detail about your trauma. Your provider will guide you through it, keep track of your anxiety level as you talk, and will make sure you take things at your own pace. You will listen to a recording of this part of your session at home between sessions.

Group or individual?

PE is an individual therapy. You will meet one-to-one with your provider for each session.

Will I have homework?

Yes, you will practice doing some of the things you have avoided since your trauma. You will start with activities that are manageable for you, and you will work up to activities that are more challenging. You will also listen to a recording of your therapy sessions, including your imaginal exposure recording. Practicing these skills between sessions helps you get the most out of PE.

How available is this in VA?

Almost all VA Medical Centers offer PE in their specialized PTSD programs and more than 2,000 VA providers are trained in PE. Smaller VA facilities that do not offer PE may be able to use video-conferencing to have you receive PE from a provider at another location.

See what Veterans have to say:

“ Now that I have had PE, I can do the things that I’ve done before I went to Iraq. I can barbecue. I can go to crowded places. I can drive a car. I can be around people, my friends and family. ”

Valeria Ovalle

“ I had a problem believing that this therapy, me actually living the trauma over and over was going to help me ... but as I did it more and more and more, the therapy, it works. You listen to it and you listen to it and eventually, you’re controlling the memory versus it controlling you. ”

Arthur Jefferson

“ I had to spend at least 30 minutes in a restaurant, which was, at first, it was real difficult, but now, I’m up to, at least, I can go in and have dinner and not have to worry about getting out of there in a sweat. ”

Curtis Cedarbaum