



# EMDR Treatment and the Gate Control Theory of Pain

EMDR calms the brain, and a calmer brain sends fewer pain signals to the body.

EMDR can be helpful for chronic pain, stress-related pain, pain linked to emotional strain, and ongoing tension held in the body.

## How the brain and body manage pain

Imagine your spinal cord has a series of small control gates. These gates regulate how many pain signals travel up to the brain, like a traffic light that can let signals through or hold them back. When the gate is open, pain signals pass through freely and the brain perceives them as intense. When the gate is closed, fewer signals get through and the experience of pain reduces.

Pain is more complex than it might seem. It's shaped not just by physical sensation, but by our thoughts, memories, and emotional state. Stress and distress tend to open the gate, making pain feel louder. Calm and a sense of safety tend to close it.

You might have experienced this yourself. Think of times when you've been absorbed in something or under enormous pressure and only noticed an ache or injury afterwards. Pain perception shifts depending on what's happening in the mind and nervous system.

## How EMDR helps

Emotional stress often settles in the body; in the shoulders, neck, and back. EMDR works by reprocessing the memories and stress responses that keep the nervous system on high alert. As the brain's interpretation of those experiences shifts, the pain gate begins to close.

Over time, EMDR can help your body feel safer. And when the body feels safer, it stops amplifying pain signals in the same way.

