

## RESEARCH

### Exposure Therapy for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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*Exposure therapy is a well-established treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that requires the patient to focus on and describe the details of a traumatic experience. Exposure methods include confrontation with frightening, yet realistically safe, stimuli that continues until anxiety is reduced. A review of the literature on exposure therapy indicates strong support from well-controlled studies applied across trauma populations. However, there are many misconceptions about exposure therapy that may interfere with its widespread use. These myths and clinical guidelines are addressed. It is concluded that exposure therapy is a safe and effective treatment for PTSD when applied as directed by experienced therapists.*

Exposure therapy, also referred to as flooding, imaginal, in vivo, prolonged, or directed exposure, is a well-established treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that requires the patient to focus on and describe the details of a traumatic experience in a therapeutic manner. Exposure methods share the common feature of confrontation with frightening, yet realistically safe, stimuli that continues until the anxiety is reduced. The rationale for exposure therapy is that by continuing to expose oneself to a safe, yet frightening, stimulus, anxiety diminishes, leading to a decrease in escape and avoidance behavior that was maintained via negative reinforcement (1).

In this article, we will first discuss the theory of Cognitive Behavioral Treatments (CBT), specifically exposure therapy, for PTSD. Next, we will demonstrate the efficacy of exposure therapy for PTSD by reviewing the

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