

Can just 5 therapy sessions work for those with PTSD?

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(HealthDay)—A mere five sessions of specialized therapy could help

people struggling from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), new research suggests.

The findings could help address time constraints that sometimes prevent people from getting the [treatment](#) they need, the researchers noted.

Exposure to physical or psychological trauma can cause PTSD. People with the condition may experience flashbacks, nightmares, disruptive thoughts, sleeping problems and social issues.

The condition is usually treated with trauma-focused therapy. This includes one of two types: cognitive processing therapy (CPT) or written [exposure](#) therapy (WET).

Cognitive processing therapy is viewed as the best initial treatment for PTSD. It includes 12 therapy sessions that focus on helping patients recognize and stop problematic thoughts about themselves, others, the world and the traumatic event they faced. People undergoing CPT usually have assignments to complete outside of their therapy sessions.

Written exposure therapy, on the other hand, involves only five therapy sessions. People receiving this treatment are asked to write about the traumatic event they faced. They also receive written instructions but do not have to complete assignments outside of therapy.

For the study, Boston University researchers analyzed treatment outcomes among 126 adults with PTSD. Of these patients, 63 were randomly assigned to received WET and 63 received CPT.

The investigators found that five sessions of written [exposure therapy](#) was just as effective as 12 sessions of cognitive processing [therapy](#) for people with post-traumatic stress.

"Our findings that WET is as efficient and efficacious as CPT for PTSD may reduce attrition and transcend previously observed barriers to PTSD treatment for both patients and providers," study corresponding author Denise Sloan said in a university news release.

She is associate director in the behavioral science division at the National Center for PTSD at the VA Boston Healthcare System.

The study was funded by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health. The findings were published online recently in the journal *JAMA Psychiatry*.

More information: The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has more about [trauma-focused therapy](#).

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