

## CLINICIAN'S USER GUIDE

### PTSD TREATMENT DECISION AID: THE CHOICE IS YOURS

#### LEARN

Learn about PTSD and how this decision aid can help

#### COMPARE

Compare effective PTSD treatment options

#### ACT

Take action to start treatment



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## OVERVIEW

### WHAT IS THE PTSD TREATMENT DECISION AID?

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The [PTSD Treatment Decision Aid](#) is an online tool developed by the National Center for PTSD to help patients learn about effective treatment options and think about which one is right for them. Decision aids provide balanced information on multiple treatment options and give advice on how to choose a treatment.

The decision aid features first-line, [evidence-based PTSD treatments](#) identified in the 2017 VA/DoD Practice Guideline for Management of PTSD, including:

- Antidepressants (SSRIs and SNRIs)
- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Prolonged Exposure (PE)

The decision aid provides basic information about these PTSD treatments and gets patients ready to talk with you about their treatment options. It will still be important for you to work with your patients to reach a final decision about treatment.

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### HOW DOES THIS DECISION AID WORK?

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Patients can move through PTSD Treatment Decision Aid step-by-step, or jump to the sections that most interest them. They will have a chance to:

- Read about effective treatments
- Watch videos explaining how different treatments work
- Compare features of the treatments they like best
- Get answers to common questions about PTSD treatment

Patients can also generate a personalized summary, which includes information about their symptoms, goals, treatment preferences and questions. It is important for patients to save or print this summary because any information entered into the decision aid will be deleted once the

browser closes. Your patient can bring the summary to his or her next appointment and use it as a jumping-off point to discuss next steps for treatment. See the [APPENDIX](#) for an example of a personalized summary.

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### WHO SHOULD USE THIS DECISION AID?

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Anyone can use the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid, but it was designed specifically for **people who have PTSD** (or think they might).

This decision aid was developed by the National Center for PTSD, part of the Department of Veterans Affairs, but it is **not just for Veterans**. Some information is specific to military Servicemembers and Veterans—for example, information about which treatments are common at VA hospitals—but most information applies to everyone.

This decision aid is for patients who are considering treatment for the first time as well as those who have already tried PTSD treatment. Even if past PTSD treatment was not successful, things may be different the next time around or with a different treatment.

Although the decision aid was developed for people with PTSD, **family members** and **providers** can also benefit from the information in the decision aid:

- **Family members** or loved ones of someone with PTSD can use this decision aid to learn more about PTSD treatment options. That way, they will be prepared to help their loved one choose which treatment to receive.
- **As a provider**, you can use the decision aid to find current, comprehensive information about evidence-based PTSD treatments. You will be able to see how expert providers describe these treatments to patients. You can also download handouts on each of the evidence-based treatments to print and share with your patients.

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### **WHY DOES THIS DECISION AID INCLUDE ONLY EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENTS?**

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There are many treatments for PTSD, but the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid focuses on [evidence-based PTSD treatments](#) because years of research tell us that these treatments offer the best chance of recovery. The decision aid does provide a [brief list of other treatments](#) that were reviewed in the 2017 VA/DoD PTSD Guideline.

If you or your clinic offer PTSD treatment options other than the evidence-based interventions featured in this decision aid, you can inform patients of these additional options and their risks and benefits. Sometimes people with PTSD may choose to receive a treatment that is not evidence-based, and they may find such treatments helpful.

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### **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO USE THIS DECISION AID?**

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User testing indicated that it took most people 30 to 40 minutes to work through the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid, though it varied from one person to the next. This decision aid contains a great deal of text, video and multimedia content. In many places, users have the option to go deeper and get even more information on a particular topic. If a user were to read all the text and watch all the videos, it would take several hours from start to finish.

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## USING THE DECISION AID WITH PATIENTS

### HOW CAN MY PATIENTS USE THE PTSD TREATMENT DECISION AID?

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There are two ways patients can use the decision aid:

1. Patients can use it on their own. Tell your patients that if they are interested in learning about evidence-based PTSD treatments, the decision aid is a great place to start. Share the decision aid URL, and encourage them to spend some time using it at home. You can even pull up the decision aid on your office computer to give your patient a quick tour of the tool, so that he or she knows what to expect. Schedule a follow up appointment to review your patient's personalized summary and work together to decide on a course of treatment.
2. You and your patient can use the decision aid together. During an appointment, you can navigate through it step-by-step, or you can show your patient certain features of the decision aid that you think will be most helpful, such as the [treatment comparison chart](#) or the video gallery.

Which approach you use depends on what you and your patient prefer. It also depends on the amount of time you have available. For example, if you only have 5 minutes of your appointment to devote to the decision aid, it is best to provide the URL and have the patient work through the decision aid on his or her own, to allow for sufficient time to review it.

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#### SHARING THE DECISION AID URL

[www.ptsd.va.gov/decisionaid](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/decisionaid)

- ✓ If your institution allows, you can email or secure message the link to your patients
- ✓ Print and share [this handout](#)
- ✓ Jot down the URL on the back of a card or on a piece of paper

## HOW CAN THIS DECISION AID HELP MY PATIENTS?

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There are several evidence-based treatments for PTSD. But there's no single treatment that works for everyone. That means that people with PTSD have options. The decision aid can:

### **Help patients learn about and compare evidence-based treatment options**

Among people with PTSD symptoms, there are many misconceptions about PTSD treatment. Many people do not know which PTSD treatments are effective. They also do not know what to expect from treatment, like what they will be asked to do or talk about, how long treatment lasts, or how well it works. To educate patients and correct common misconceptions, the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid includes comprehensive information about evidence-based treatment options.

### **Encourage patients to get involved in their treatment decisions**

Patients often assume that the provider is the expert and they should do whatever the provider recommends. But research shows that when patients are involved in the treatment decision and receive a preferred treatment, they are more likely to benefit from treatment.<sup>1</sup> The decision aid encourages patients to participate in treatment decisions and includes helpful tips on how they can talk with their provider about PTSD treatment options.

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## WILL THIS DECISION AID TELL MY PATIENTS WHICH PTSD TREATMENT THEY SHOULD RECEIVE?

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No, it will not. The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid can help patients identify which treatments might be a good fit based on their preferences. Patients can then explore these treatments and identify which treatments they would like to discuss with their provider.

**The decision aid does not make treatment recommendations based on patients' demographic characteristics (age, gender, race/ethnicity) or clinical characteristics (trauma type, symptom severity, comorbidities, etc.).** The reason for this is that we know very little about how such characteristics relate to success in particular treatments.

It is important to remember that the decision aid serves as a starting point in the decision-making process. Patients will need to work with their provider to make a final treatment decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Le, Doctor, Zoellner, & Feeny, 2014

### MY PATIENT USED THE PTSD TREATMENT DECISION AID. NOW WHAT?

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After your patient uses the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid, meet with your patient to:

**Review your patient's personal summary.** Answer any questions listed on their summary and discuss your patient's treatment preferences.

**Check your patient's treatment knowledge.** Ask your patient to tell you what he or she learned from the decision aid and correct any misconceptions. Ask if there is any additional information that your patient needs.

**Talk with your patient about treatment cost and availability.** This decision aid does not tell patients how much treatment will cost or which treatments are readily available in their area, so it is important for you to address these topics with each patient.

**Help your patient deliberate.** Ask what your patient likes and dislikes about different treatments and explore what matters most to him or her. Once you and your patient agree on a course of action, make sure your patient knows what to expect in terms of next steps.

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### WHAT IF MY PATIENT LEARNS ABOUT A TREATMENT THAT I DON'T OFFER?

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Ideally, every patient with PTSD would have access to all evidence-based treatment options. But in reality, it may be difficult for patients to access certain interventions. Most providers are not trained to deliver all evidence-based treatments. For example, psychologists may be trained in some psychotherapy interventions, but typically cannot prescribe medications. And because it takes intensive training and supervision to become skilled in the delivery of an evidence-based psychotherapy, many providers are proficient in some but not all of these protocols.

A patient who uses this decision aid may become interested in a particular evidence-based treatment that is not offered by his or her local mental health provider or clinic.

If your patient requests a treatment that you do not offer, you can inform the patient of the treatments you do offer and ask whether he or she would like a referral to a provider who does offer the preferred treatment. You can then help the patient deliberate between these options. The patient might decide that it is most important to stay with his or her current provider/clinic, even if it means not getting



a first-choice treatment. Or, the patient may decide that he or she is willing to work with a different provider or even travel long distances to find a preferred treatment.

Giving patients information about all evidence-based treatments for PTSD (even those treatments that may be hard to find) allows them to understand the full menu of options that exist. Survey research tells us that people with PTSD symptoms are interested in learning about all evidence-based treatments, not just those that are highly available.<sup>2</sup>

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### **WHAT IF MY PATIENT DOES NOT WANT ANY OF THE FEATURED TREATMENTS?**

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Some patients who use the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid may decide that none of the evidence-based treatments featured in the decision aid are right for them. They may prefer an alternative treatment or they may choose not to engage in treatment at all.

In both cases you and your patient can discuss the risks and benefits of these choices. While more improvement is associated with those treatments included in this Decision Aid, it is important that patients understand that people can get better even if they do not engage with one of these evidence-based treatments, but that more improvement is associated with those treatments.

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### **WHAT IF MY PATIENT HAS OTHER PROBLEMS IN ADDITION TO PTSD?**

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The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid does not include information about treatments for conditions other than PTSD. However, you can still use this decision aid with patients who have other diagnoses or problems in addition to PTSD. Several research trials have shown that patients with PTSD and co-occurring mental health disorders (such as substance use, depression, or psychotic disorders) can benefit from evidence-based PTSD treatments. In some cases, symptoms of these co-occurring disorders improve with successful PTSD treatment.

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<sup>2</sup> Harik, Hundt, Bernardy, Norman, & Hamblen, 2016

**WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?**

If you are a provider who treats Veterans and you have additional questions about the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid or about PTSD treatment in general contact the [PTSD Consultation Program](#) for free consultation, education and information.

### PTSD Consultation Program



## PTSD Consultation Program

FOR PROVIDERS WHO TREAT VETERANS

(866) 948-7880 or [PTSDconsult@va.gov](mailto:PTSDconsult@va.gov)

Overview

Consultants


Resources

FAQ (Videos)

Lecture Series


Any provider who treats Veterans with PTSD can ask a question or request consultation about PTSD-related issues. Watch our [overview video](#) to learn more.






**E-MAIL**

[PTSDconsult@va.gov](mailto:PTSDconsult@va.gov)



**CALL**

**(866) 948-7880**



**VISIT**

[www.ptsd.va.gov/consult](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/consult)

Other feedback, questions, or concerns about the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid can be directed to [NCPTSD@va.gov](mailto:NCPTSD@va.gov).

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## My Summary

This is a summary of my treatment needs and preferences that I uncovered by using the National Center for PTSD decision aid tool. My provider can use this summary to help me decide where to go from here.



## My profile

**I'm not sure if I have PTSD. I am having these symptoms:**

- Have had nightmares about it or thought about it when you did not want to?
- Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of it?
- Were constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?
- Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings?

Your answers suggest that you are having PTSD symptoms. The results of this survey cannot say for sure whether a person has PTSD. Talk to a provider as soon as possible so they can conduct a complete assessment. Only a qualified provider can diagnose PTSD.

If three or more boxes are checked, your patient screened positive on the Primary Care PTSD Screen (PC-PTSD) and you should assess for PTSD.

## I LEARNED what I want in a PTSD treatment

**Q: Which type of treatment most interests you?**

My answer: Psychotherapy

**Q: How open are you to talking or writing about your trauma in detail during treatment?**

My answer: I may be open to talking or writing about my trauma, if it could help me get better

**Q: Are you interested in group treatment or individual treatment?**

My answer: One-on-One

**Q: How often do you want to meet with your provider?**

My answer: I would prefer to meet more often, over a shorter period of time (for example, every week for about 3 months)

**Q: How open are you to doing "practice assignments" between sessions?**

My answer: I want to be able to practice skills on my own

**Q: In making a decision about which PTSD treatment is right for you, is the number and quality of research studies important to you?**

My answer: Yes

Take a look to learn more about your patient's treatment preferences.

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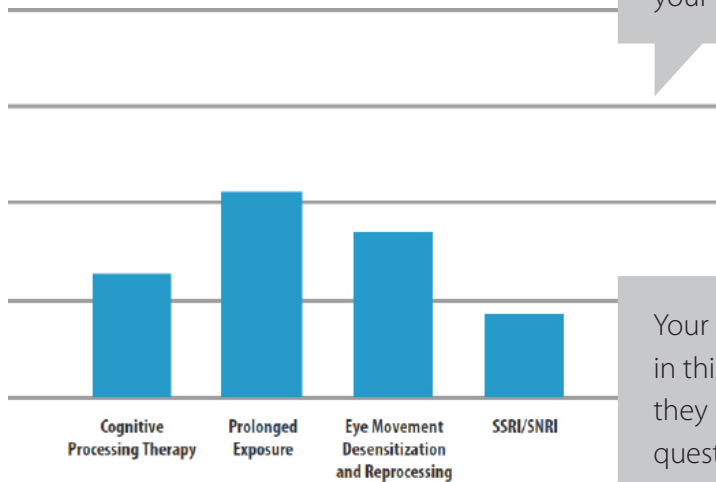
I COMPARED different PTSD treatments

Based on what I liked about different treatments, the following treatments might be a good fit for me:

- Prolonged Exposure
- Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing

MY TREATMENT PREFERENCES

Here is a summary of the number of things you liked about each of the treatment options.



The graph shows which treatments best align with your patient's preferences.

Your patient is interested in this treatment! Ask what they liked about it and what questions they have. Tell them whether this treatment is easily available.

I would like to discuss these treatments with my provider:

- Prolonged Exposure

I took steps to ACT on a treatment that seems right to me

My goals for treatment:

- Sleep through the night
- Stop getting angry over little things
- Have fewer nightmares
- Get back into old hobbies

This information can be useful to you when you create your patient's treatment plan.

My questions:

- Will a provider who has not had similar experiences be able to help me?
- Can I get PTSD treatment if I am drinking or using drugs?

Be sure to make time to talk through these questions together.

My plans:

- Discuss my thoughts about PTSD treatment with a friend or family member

Ask if your patient has accomplished this task yet, or ask how you can support them in getting this done.

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