

## **When Will I see Progress?**

### **What does research show about the effectiveness of therapy?**

Research suggests that therapy effectively decreases patients' depression and anxiety and related symptoms—such as pain, fatigue and nausea. Therapy has also been found to increase survival time for heart surgery and cancer patients, and it can have a positive effect on the body's immune system. Research increasingly supports the idea that emotional and physical health are very closely linked and that therapy can improve a person's overall health status.

There is convincing evidence that most people who have at least several sessions of therapy are far better off than untreated individuals with emotional difficulties. One major study showed that 50 percent of patients noticeably improved after eight sessions while 75 percent of individuals in therapy improved by the end of six months. Psychotherapy with children is similar in effectiveness to therapy with adults.

### **If I begin therapy, how should I try to gain the most from it?**

There are many approaches to outpatient therapy and various formats in which it may occur, including individual, group and family therapy. Despite the variations, all therapy is a two-way process that works especially well when patients and their psychologists communicate openly. Research has shown that the outcome of therapy is improved when the psychologist and patient agree early about what the major problems are and how therapy can help.

You and your psychologist both have responsibilities in establishing and maintaining a good working relationship. Be clear with your psychologist about your expectations and share any concerns that may arise. Therapy works best when you attend all scheduled sessions and give some forethought to what you want to discuss during each one.

### **How can I evaluate whether therapy is working well?**

As you begin therapy, you should establish clear goals with your psychologist. Perhaps you want to overcome feelings of hopelessness associated with depression. Or maybe you would like to control a fear that disrupts your daily life. Keep in mind that certain tasks require more time to accomplish than others.

After a few sessions, it's a good sign if you feel the experience is truly a joint effort and that you and the therapist enjoy a good rapport. On the other hand, you should be open with your psychologist if you find yourself feeling "stuck" or lacking direction once you've been in therapy awhile.

There may be times when a psychologist appears cold and uninterested or doesn't seem to regard you positively. Tell your psychologist if this is the situation, or if you question other aspects of his or her approach. If you find yourself thinking about discontinuing therapy, talk with your psychologist. It might be helpful to consult another professional, provided you let your therapist know you are seeking a second opinion.

Patients often feel a wide range of emotions during therapy. Some qualms about therapy that people may have result from the difficulty of discussing painful and troubling experiences. When this happens, it can actually be a positive sign indicating that you are starting to explore your thoughts and behaviors.

You should spend time with your psychologist periodically reviewing your progress (or your concern that you are not making sufficient headway). Although there are other considerations affecting the duration of therapy, success in reaching your primary goals should be a major factor in deciding when your therapy should end.

Therapy isn't easy, but patients who are willing to work in close partnership with their psychologist often find relief from their emotional distress and begin to lead more productive and fulfilling lives.

Information obtained from the [APA Health Center](#)