



Rebuilding Your Confidence

Trauma, Lyme & Mental Health

CONFIDENCE AFTER TRAUMA

42 year old Jill*, diagnosed with PTSD, had a background of childhood abuse and stomach issues. Presented with waking anxiety in the mornings and GI complaints related to remembering early abuse. I started Natural Processing (Somatic EMDR) with her. Over a few months her anxiety was greatly reduced where she was not waking up with the same panic in the morning. Her stomach issues had improved where she was no longer having as many issues with food and gastroparesis. She was feeling more calm and able to talk about the abuse with her family, which she had never disclosed. She is now looking to be an advocate for others.



What is trauma and how does it affect mental health?

Trauma is a strong overwhelming emotional response someone has to an extremely negative event. Some common sources of trauma are rape, domestic violence, natural disasters, severe illness or injury, the death of a loved one, and witnessing an act of violence. The effects can be so severe that they interfere with an individual's ability to function normally. In these cases, help may be needed to treat the stress and dysfunction caused by the traumatic event and to restore and individual's mental and emotional stability.

At critical points in our development trauma can literally alter brain structure in ways that make an individual more vulnerable to intense, negative emotions. This

vulnerability sets up individuals to be triggered or activated by intense or negative emotions. When something happens in the present that triggers the past emotional traumatic state, individuals have a tendency to overreact and have difficulties with self-soothing.

However, the fact that an individual has a propensity to experience intense negative emotions from past trauma doesn't mean the problem can't be overcome. Trauma therapy helps individuals reprocess the negative memories and feelings connected with their traumatic experience, resulting in a decrease in the intensity, duration and frequency of negative emotions and stress. As a result of this work, clients are able to reconnect to others and live normal lives.

What is Lyme and how does it affect mental health?

Lyme is a spirochete bacterial infection, primarily transmitted by ticks. Left untreated, or insufficiently treated, it crosses the blood brain barrier and impacts one's neuro-psychiatric health. Complicating the disease, ticks often carry other infections besides Lyme, such as Babesia, Bartonella, and Ehrlichia. All these can result in symptoms similar to mental illness.

Common symptoms include:

- anxiety
- depression
- irritability
- easy tearfulness
- sleep disturbances
- eating disorders

In some cases of undetected Lyme, patients may exhibit:

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- paranoia
- panic attacks
- auditory/visual hallucinations
- full blown mania

Cognitive difficulties are also common, such as:

- decreased attention span
- slow processing
- visual/spatial (e.g. getting lost easily)
- short term and working memory
- word finding/generation and communication difficulties
- decline in executive functions (e.g. planning and organization)
- confusion
- decline in overall intellectual performance
- fatigue

Lyme/Autoimmune affects the entire family

With Lyme, many patients have an emotional roller coaster of diagnosis and treatment. Seldom is just one person affected by the disease. When one person has the illness, the treatment and ordeal takes an emotional toll on the entire family. Having gone through the illness myself, and with my loved ones, I am comfortable helping caregivers feel confident about what to expect.

Keep an open mind. There is always something to learn about the problem

I've had patients come in seeking help with depression, only for us to discover together they have an issue with vitamin deficiency, hormone imbalance, or autoimmune disease. Some patients come in for Lyme treatment and are helped when co-occurring mood disorders are treated and addressed. Other patients have come in to resolve a substance abuse addiction, and we later find it is masking root problems of chronic illness or trauma.





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Real People. Real Struggles.

Lyme is uniquely and particularly challenging because it has a tendency to isolate the patient, leaving them misunderstood by others. The symptoms and struggles are real, but perhaps more than any other illness I've worked with, its validity is questioned, its affects misunderstood—even by loved ones. This is something I hear from patients consistently and it's extremely important they have people in their lives that understand them, validate their struggles, and listen without questioning them or jumping to their own conclusions.

When I personally went undiagnosed with Lyme disease for years, the struggles I encountered were real. I have a unique understanding of autoimmune and Lyme disease and its impact on emotional health. Over the years, I've enjoyed living life, a wonderful marriage, and meaningful work as a registered Lyme Literate Therapist. In my experience, it's difficult to understate the importance of validating the real struggles of real people as the first step toward healing.

Common struggles I've seen:

Isolation and being misunderstood: Difficulty maintaining healthy relationships. Difficulty maintaining a place in society because of inconsistencies in wellness

Stigma from friends or institutions: "It's always Lyme with you" "Hypochondriac" "Lazy" "You're just depressed" "It's all in your head"

Fear of never getting better: Fear to even be hopeful. Fear that comes from lacking a plan or failure to see progress

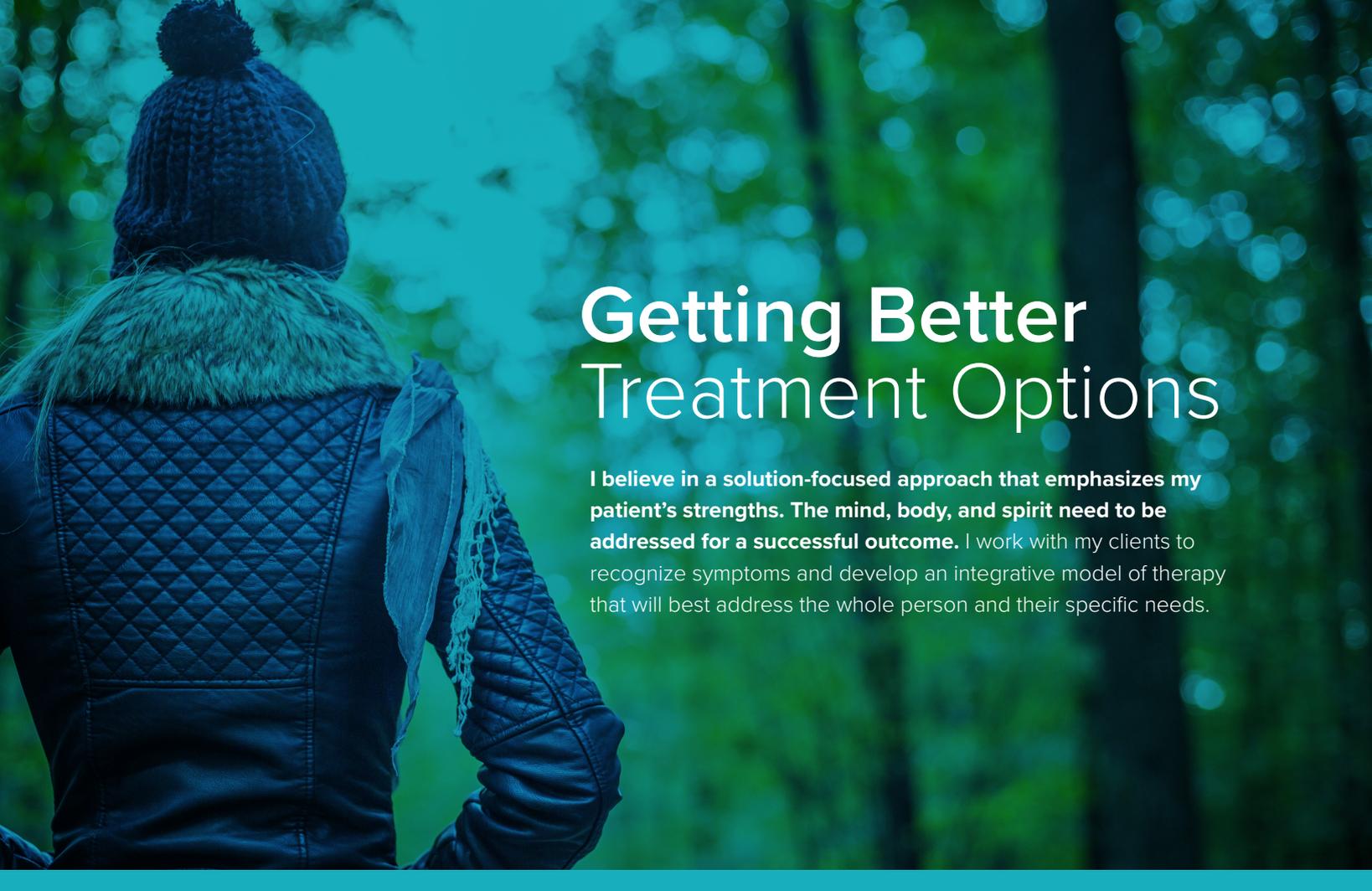
Frustration from missing out on life: When someone is no longer able to do the things they used to do, or should be able to do at their stage of life—be it college, romantic relationships, building a career, being a mother or father—it can be frustrating

Trauma exacerbating Lyme symptoms: Often patients aren't aware of existing trauma, or the connections between their trauma and Lyme

Poor Treatment: Misdiagnosis, one-dimensional or ineffective treatment, lack of support from insurance companies

CONFIDENCE AFTER GRIEF

Jessica* struggled with low-grade depression and fatigue. She also suffered from shin pain and eye issues. She was 32 years old and had recently suffered a miscarriage—when she came in she wanted to talk through the grief. After an initial evaluation I decided to refer her to my Lyme Literate practitioner in order to be tested for Lyme and coinfections. To her surprise, it was confirmed that she had bartonella, a coinfection of Lyme, which likely contributed to her miscarriage. Once treated, there were clear improvements to her symptoms and she was able to carry a healthy baby to full term.



Getting Better Treatment Options

I believe in a solution-focused approach that emphasizes my patient's strengths. The mind, body, and spirit need to be addressed for a successful outcome. I work with my clients to recognize symptoms and develop an integrative model of therapy that will best address the whole person and their specific needs.

Effective mental health therapy techniques I use include:

CBT—Cognitive Behavioral Therapy focuses on solutions, encouraging patients to challenge distorted cognitions and change destructive patterns of behavior.

Expressive Therapy—the use of art, music, creative writing and play within the context of psychotherapy

EMDR—Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy uses bilateral stimulation, right/left eye movement, or tactile stimulation, which repeatedly activates the opposite sides of the brain, releasing emotional experiences that are “trapped” in the nervous system. This detoxes the neuro-physiological system, letting it free itself of blockages, and reconnect. EMDR is an integrative approach that has been extensively researched and proven effective in the treatment of trauma.

Integrative—combined approach to psychotherapy that brings together elements of specific therapies. Integrative therapists believe there is no single approach that can treat each client in all situations. Each person needs to be considered as a whole, and counseling techniques must be tailored to their individual needs and personal circumstances.

Natural Processing—Utilizes EMDR integrated with Somatic Psychotherapy or process-oriented somatic therapy to decrease the trauma that is remembered in the body where you “feel” triggered. Natural Processing can be appropriate for trauma, anxiety, illness, phobias, panic attacks, autoimmune, PTSD and many other emotional problems.

CONFIDENCE AFTER ABUSE

A professional woman at 51 years old, Debbie* had a background of sexual abuse and autoimmune issues.

Fatigue was always an issue, and for a long time during her commutes to work she had to pull off to the side of the road to take naps. She began seeing me for EMDR therapy to treat the trauma related to the abuse. After one session of EMDR, she reported that she no longer had to take breaks on her commute. She was even sleeping better at night and was feeling more empowered in her relationships. EMDR removes emotional blocks and helps the brain process old traumas effectively. For Debbie, removing that emotional block helped her experience immediate physical improvement.

Treatment: ‘Aha’ Moments

Things are not always as they first seem with Lyme and autoimmune disease. That’s one of the most important things I’ve learned as a Lyme Literate Counselor. Over time, you learn to dig deeper, investigate causes, and connect the dots. Here are a few ‘Aha’ moments I’ve had:

Trauma and Lyme/autoimmune is very much connected

On the road to getting effective counseling, emotional or traumatic experiences sometimes pop up. Many times patients are unaware of the toll that trauma or other stressors take on their physical health. This allows the Lyme/autoimmune infection to gain ground when the body’s immune system is in a constant state of fight or flight.

Stress hormones have been found to inhibit the production of cytokines, the agents of the immune

system that respond to danger. This causes these cells to overreact and create an inflammatory response that is exaggerated, creating a larger problem than the original perceived danger. Unresolved emotional issues and negative emotional patterns can put a huge stress on the immune system. The body maintains this fight or flight mode by pumping out adrenaline and other stress hormones. While short-term exposure to adrenaline allows the body to do tremendous things, long-term exposure is detrimental to your health. Clearing these emotional issues can release the immune system from suppression.

Clients often come in for emotional counseling, unaware it stems from physical illness

I often see clients seek therapy for their depression, anxiety, or lack of sleep, unaware that their mental health symptoms stem from an autoimmune illness. To become well, the body must be rid of the bacteria. Counseling alone won’t resolve the bacterial infection. A clinician who understands the difference and realizes their client is not mentally ill can be the best advocate to help them obtain proper treatment.

Antibiotics need a wing man

Antibiotics are an important tool in the fight against Lyme/autoimmune disease. But they work best alongside an advocate who understands the patient and is educated on potential hindrances. One example is MTHFR, a genetic mutation. People with Lyme/autoimmune often have this genetic abnormality, which complicates their body’s ability to detox. This is why long-term antibiotics

alone are not effective. Patients with this issue usually have accumulated heavy metals in their system, which make eradicating the disease more difficult.

Therapies traditionally used for emotional problems can do wonders for Lyme/Autoimmune:

EMDR—Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing is a proven therapy for trauma, anxiety, phobias, illness, panic attacks, PTSD and many other emotional problems. EMDR therapy uses bilateral stimulation, right/left eye movement, or tactile stimulation, which repeatedly activates the opposite sides of the brain, releasing emotional experiences that are “trapped” in the nervous system. This detoxes the neuro-physiological system, letting it free itself of blockages, and reconnect.

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