These days, therapy doesn’t have to entail sitting on a couch and talking about your childhood. From microdosing to chatbots, learn about the multitude of effective options and figure out what will work best for you!

BY LISA ARBETTER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KEITH NEGLEY
Laura, a self-proclaimed feelings nerd, started seeing a therapist proactively before the birth of her daughter as a precaution against postpartum depression. Unfortunately, after only a few sessions, the therapist abruptly left the practice. Before Laura (last name withheld for privacy) could find someone new, her father fell gravely ill with Covid-19.

As an only child, Laura had to manage coordinating his care, and his medical decisions fell to her to handle, all while seven months pregnant and working. And, as is protocol with Covid patients, she couldn't even be at her father's bedside to comfort him as he passed away. “I wanted to lie on the couch, cry, and feel all the feelings,” says the 29-year-old. But when planning the memorial, managing his affairs, and taking care of a newborn “grieving for my dad became something that had to happen in small pockets—like in the five minutes I had to shower.”

Around this time she stumbled upon Woebot, a chatbot therapy app. Though Laura had been skeptical when she first heard of A.I. therapy, now, amid a crisis, she was willing to give it a try. She responded to a few prompts, and the app recognized she was grieving. It then asked her to describe her dad and her feelings about his death. “I realized that no one had asked me those questions and how badly I had needed to answer them,” says Laura. “I was able to put into writing how wonderful my dad was and how much I miss him. It felt like a weight was lifted.”

Woebot is but one example of how technology is changing the face of mental health care. Psychedelic drug treatments are coming to the fore, and interactive technology provides some hope.

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One found that, of the survivors of the 2004 tsunami in Thailand who underwent one or two sessions of an EMDR-based intervention, 90 percent reported partial to complete remission of symptoms one year later.

While not new, EMDR recently made news when Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, received the treatment on camera in his and Oprah’s docuseries. The Duke, 36, says he felt “the venom dissolve. I wasn’t blinking anymore.”

Priscilla started EMDR after a toxic job left her questioning her abilities and feeling physically ill. For months the 31-year-old says she endured gaslighting and insults from her inexperienced supervisor, who at one point even told her to see a therapist about getting on meds. After some initial assessment, EMDR patients are asked to revisit traumatic events while rapidly moving their eyes and perhaps performing repetitive tapping on their shoulders and knees. According to the APA, unlike other treatments that focus on altering the emotions and responses resulting from traumatic experiences, EMDR focuses on the memory, with the intention of changing how it is stored in the brain. The result is a reduction or elimination in the problematic symptoms.

Though how it works isn’t entirely understood, it’s thought that the eye movements or tapping reistrate the ability to process distressing events. Still, its effectiveness is clear, with organizations such as the APA recognizing EMDR as an effective form of treatment for trauma in particular and other disturbing experiences. Priscilla says EMDR allowed her to see a therapist about getting on meds. After some initial assessment, EMDR patients are asked to revisit traumatic events while rapidly moving their eyes and perhaps performing repetitive tapping on their shoulders and knees. According to the APA, unlike other treatments that focus on altering the emotions and responses resulting from traumatic experiences, EMDR focuses on the memory, with the intention of changing how it is stored in the brain. The result is a reduction or elimination in the problematic symptoms.

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I thought that the level of anxiety that I lived with was who I was.
It wasn't until I did somatic work that I was like, “Oh my God, this is changeable.”