

## Somato Emotional Release: The Holistic Technique That Can Treat Both Your Body And Your Mind



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Our thoughts and emotions affect our sleep, mood, energy levels, and overall health. Think about how you feel when you're anxious or depressed — your energy goes down, your joints hurt, and you can barely focus on the tasks at hand. Depression can also cause headaches, back pain, nausea, constipation, and other physical symptoms while increasing your risk of heart disease.

Emotional, mental, and physical health are strongly connected. For example, prolonged or chronic stress fuels negative emotions, which in turn can affect your heart, immune system, and brain function, notes a 2020 review published in *Psychosomatic Medicine*. Poor emotional health can also lead to high blood pressure, chest pain, heart palpitations, dry mouth, or sexual problems, warns the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Given these aspects, it's no surprise that about one-third of American adults are now attending therapy, according to a 2020 survey conducted by OnePoll. However, therapy can take many forms, and sometimes, it has nothing to do with clinical counseling. An example is Somato Emotional Release (SER), a mind-body approach that attempts to heal physical pain by addressing unresolved emotions.

## The concept behind Somato Emotional Release



Back in the late 1970s, biophysicist Zvi Karni and osteopathic physician Dr. John E. Upledger realized that some physical symptoms were tied to past trauma and other emotional issues. For example, shoulder pain may stem from childhood trauma, such as the memory of a punitive teacher who used to grab your upper arm. In this case, your shoulder may not heal unless you identify and address the root cause of the pain.

The two scientists developed a technique called Somato Emotional Release (SER) to help their patients overcome unresolved trauma. They also coined the term "energy cyst," which describes an area of tissue with an electric charge. These "cysts" occur in the areas that were subject to trauma, and some are palpable. SER practitioners can detect them and facilitate healing.

This practice has its roots in CranioSacral Therapy (CST), a hands-on method developed by Dr. Upledger. The therapy can benefit people with chronic pain, fibromyalgia, insomnia, traumatic brain injuries, scoliosis, and other ailments. Some patients experience Somato Emotional Release during CST sessions, but you can book a standalone SER session to reap the benefits.

## What's an SER session like?



Somato Emotional Release is a form of bodywork that relies on touch. First, you'll lie down and relax with your eyes closed. The therapist will place their hands on your head, chest, stomach, and other body areas while guiding your breathing. They'll also use guided imagery and other techniques to help you connect with your inner self and identify unresolved issues, such as childhood trauma. Their role is to guide your thoughts — not to control you.

"The body is guiding us, so I don't have an intention when I approach any client's body," Dawn Phillips, a therapist who specializes in SER, told Byrdie. "A release can be as simple as just a really deep breath. Or, a release could be sobbing, laughter, or visualizations. It can even be a change in how we're sensing our body, like feeling lighter, heavier, or more grounded."

Byrdie writer Mica Kanner-Mascolo, who underwent the technique, experienced a mix of emotions ranging from fear to calmness. She also cried while digging deep into her subconscious mind, but stayed present throughout the session. An hour later, she walked away "feeling lighter" and looking forward to the next session. Phillips told her to engage in self-reflection and disconnect from technology for the rest of the day.

## The benefits of SER go beyond stress relief



Alternative therapies like SER, healing crystals, and acupuncture haven't been as extensively studied as conventional treatments, but this doesn't mean they're less effective. Some people experience the benefits of SER on day one, whereas others see improvements within a week or so. These may include a better mood, stress relief, diminished pain, increased self-awareness, and more.

A 2015 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* found that Somatic Experiencing (SE) — a technique similar to SER — can improve well-being and reduce anxiety. This practice aims to increase mental resilience to trauma, but many of its concepts overlap with SER. Other studies suggest that SE may benefit patients with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or low back pain, reports a 2021 review featured in the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*.

SER could be one of the best ways to help yourself feel less anxious. This technique creates a safe space where you can get in touch with your emotions without losing control. At the same time, it relaxes your body and releases the tension in your head, muscles, and joints. It's not a cure-all, but it could change your life for the better.

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