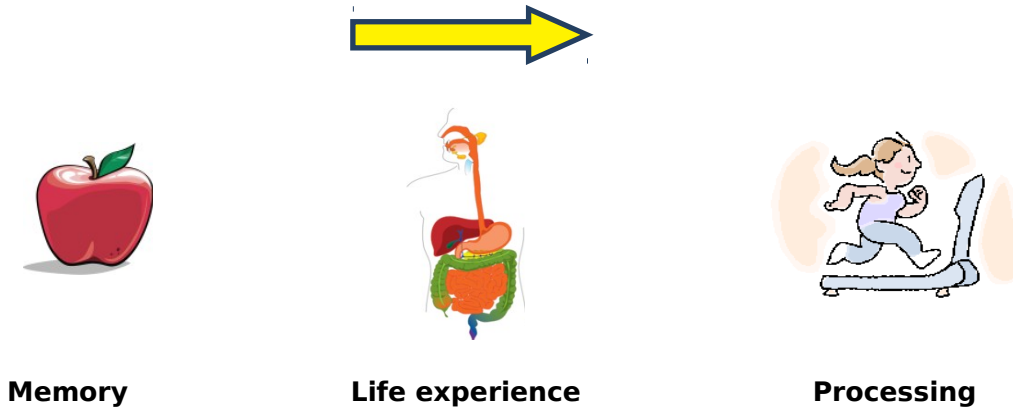


# Treating Traumatic Memories

We can understand how the mind processes experiences and turns them into memories by considering how our body turns food into energy. Most life events are like healthy, familiar foods. When experienced, they are easy to digest, packaged into nutrients, and transformed into energy that the body can use.



However, sometimes there is a traumatic life experience that is too difficult to process. In the same way, the stomach will have difficulties digesting something that can make us physically sick.



Instead of being transformed into energy, the food remains undigested, just as the traumatic event remains unprocessed; preventing it from becoming a memory. Because the experience does not become memory, and thus a factor from the past, it remains a current issue in the person's life. Current situations may remind the individual of the trauma and trigger flashbacks, where the person re-lives the emotional experience and physical sensations that occurred during the original trauma. Individuals will tend to avoid situations that trigger flashbacks, as a person would avoid foods that are known to have made them sick before.

Learning to cope with the traumatic experience through treatment is similar to learning how to recognize the signs of spoiled food, rather than avoiding that type of food all together, so that the digestive system can process it properly. In treatment, this means exposing the individual to thinking about and imagining the event and then gradually exposing the individual to typically avoided situations. This will lead to some experiences of distress along the way, but will help the individual learn to process the traumatic experience and significantly reduced stress overall.

