

Bright light therapy

What is bright light therapy?

Many people suffer from lethargy and depression during the dark winter season. This condition is known as SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). Scientific research has shown that as the amount of natural light decreases, the body may physiologically respond to these “unfavourable living conditions” by adjusting certain hormone levels and biological activities. SUB SAD or the Winter Blues is a milder form of SAD affecting a considerably larger number of people.

The effects of these adjustments may include:

- intense fatigue, exhaustion and various sleep disorders
- increased appetite leading to weight gain
- general passivity and depression
- decreased work efficiency and loss of vitality

On a sunny day the strength of light is approximately 50 000–100 000 lux, whereas indoors it is as little as 50–100 lux. An effective bright light therapy session requires the eyes to be exposed to at least 2 500 lux. Via the retina and the optic nerves the light affects the brain’s light sensitive region (suprachiasmatic cellkernel), which adjusts the body’s physiological cycles in accordance with the rhythm of day and night. The light reduces the amount of the sleep hormone melatonin, secreted by the pineal gland. Melatonin is a key factor in the regulation of alertness and sleep cycles, but also in the prevention of SAD. Bright light therapy helps you to alleviate these problems and regain vitality.

If the symptoms are severe, they should be treated under medical supervision.



Therapy instructions

Start bright light therapy before any symptoms of SAD appear, preferably soon after nights start drawing in in October–November. Take a bright light session 3–5 times a week throughout the winter. If the symptoms are not relieved or they reappear, try taking daily sessions for 1–2 weeks. You may even begin with daily sessions or repeat this intensity whenever you feel you need it.

One session lasts for 0,5–2 hours. It is most effective in the morning between 6 and 10. A session in the evening may disturb sleep.

There is no need to look straight into the light source, but you should keep it within your visual field during the whole session. In the meantime you can for example read. The therapy distance is 2 meters the strength of the light being 2 500 lux. You can shorten the required session time by sitting closer to the lamp.

Important notes on bright light therapy

After the first sessions, mild headache or eye strain may occur. This is quite normal and such side effects usually disappear in a few days. If this does not happen, stop the therapy and consult your doctor before continuing.

Not all people suffer from SAD due to lack of daylight. Exhaustion, sleep disorders and depression may have other causes.

Bright light therapy is most effective when combined with regular physical exercise and a healthy diet.

Consult your doctor before starting bright light therapy if you suffer from

- eye illnesses (e.g. eye inflammation or hypersensitivity)
- mental disorders
- or if you use psychotropic drugs

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Source: Innojok - Innolux, User's instructions

