



NeuRA

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BIPOLAR DISORDERS Factsheet

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What is bright light therapy?

Light therapy, also called phototherapy, involves the use of a bright artificial light to improve depressive mood. It has long been used in psychiatric practice, usually for the treatment of seasonal affective disorder. The mechanism by which light therapy regulates mood is unclear. It has been suggested to have modulating effects on serotonin and melatonin and on the synchronisation of circadian rhythms, which is why it is often accompanied by sleep deprivation. This topic assesses the use of bright light therapy for depressive symptoms of bipolar disorder.

What is the evidence for bright light therapy?

Moderate to high quality evidence finds a medium-sized improvement in depression symptoms with bright light therapy compared to placebo. There was no increased risk of shifting to a manic state with bright light therapy.

Moderate quality evidence finds greater improvements in depression symptoms in studies using <10 hours compared to >10 hours of bright light therapy, in studies using morning plus night exposure compared to morning exposure only, and in studies with adjunctive sleep deprivation and/or lithium. There were no differences in studies with or without other psychotropic medications, in studies using colour temperature < vs. >4500k, in studies using light intensity < vs. >5000lux, or in studies using white or green light therapy.

For further information see the technical table

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

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NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about bipolar disorder or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.

NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) Foundation
T 1300 888 019 F +61 2 9399 1082
ABN 57 008 429 961

Margarete Ainsworth Building
Barker Street, Randwick NSW 2031
PO Box 1165 Randwick Sydney NSW 2031 Australia

neura.edu.au