

Questions & Answers About Bright Light Therapy



1. What is bright light therapy?

Bright light therapy uses daily, scheduled exposure to intense levels of artificial bright light. Researchers have deemed the fluorescent white light box as the “gold standard” for bright light therapy.

2. What is bright light therapy used for?

Researchers have studied bright light therapy for the treatment of:

- The Winter Blues
- Disrupted sleeping patterns
- Jet Lag/Shift Work Adjustment

3. What are the Winter Blues?

The Winter Blues are a milder form of Seasonal Affective Disorder. Symptoms may include: feeling down, moodiness, low energy, fatigue, lethargy, weight gain, social withdrawal or disrupted sleeping patterns.

4. How prevalent is the Winter Blues?

The Winter Blues has been estimated to impact as many as 15% of the North American population or about 44 million people to some degree. Women are at least twice as likely to suffer as men.

5. How do I know if I could benefit from using a bright light system?

You might benefit from using a bright light system if you experience symptoms of the Winter Blues. As well, you may also benefit year-round if you suffer from some sleep problems, travel frequently or are a shift worker. If you suspect you have a condition that can be treated with bright light therapy, consult your physician for treatment guidelines.

6. Has bright light been proven to work?

Yes, since the first controlled bright light therapy study in 1984, there have been over 60 controlled studies published by researchers around the world.

7. How do bright lights work?

Two main hypotheses are postulated:

- Bright lights reset the daily body clock (i.e., circadian rhythms) which, for some, tends to get out of balance during the winter; or
- Bright lights affect the pineal gland and help suppress melatonin production (this makes you sleepy) and increase the level of the serotonin (this increases energy) which would otherwise decrease in the fall and winter.

8. How long does it take to experience the benefits of using bright light therapy?

Response to bright light therapy is usually very quick, with noticeable improvement within one week and increasing response even after three or four weeks.

9. Could I get the same benefits by increasing the lighting in my home and office?

Yes, you may benefit with increased exposure to normal room lighting. However, research shows that much higher light intensities are often required to produce a therapeutic effect. Regular fixtures usually cannot raise ambient lighting above 600 LUX.

10. What about spending more time outdoors -- would that work?

Yes, you could satisfy your need for light by spending more time outdoors in the fall and winter, if you can be so regularly and for extended periods. However, this can be difficult if you have an “office schedule”. Using a bright light system is often the most convenient way to get the light you need.

11. Are there any side-effects from using bright light systems?

Yes, but using a properly constructed bright light system as recommended is considered very safe, and few people have to stop use due to side effects. Temporary side effects, such as slight nausea, may occur, but these should pass quickly as you adjust to the high intensity of light.

Other side effects - headache, eye strain, agitation or insomnia are usually due to therapy sessions being too long. These should disappear when the light “dosage” is set to the optimal level (usu. 20-30 mins).

12. When is the use of a bright light system not recommended?

There are no absolute contraindications to light therapy. However, if you have any eye problems (e.g., glaucoma, cataracts, retinal detachment, retinopathy) or have predisposing factors for eye complications (e.g., diabetes, lupus), or if you are taking medications (internal or topical) that have photosensitizing effects in humans (e.g., lithium, melatonin), you should not use a bright light system without first consulting your physician. Your doctor will need to assess your individual risk-benefit ratio of using bright lights.

13. Are bright lights medically approved?

At this time, there are no bright light therapy systems approved as “medical devices” by the FDA.

14. Are lights covered under medical insurance, and do I require a prescription?

Many private insurance companies recognize the benefits of light therapy and cover the purchase of a bright light system with a prescription from your doctor. Contact your insurance company to discuss coverage and specific documentation requirements.

Bright lights are coded under E0203. Medicare does not offer reimbursement for the Day-Light. They are available widely for purchase without a prescription.

15. Why do research experts & medical doctors recommend Day-Light systems?

Day-Lights, manufactured by Uplift Technologies Inc., have been used in clinical trials across North America since 1989. Day-Light technology was selected by Dr. Raymond Lam, Medical Director for the Mood Disorders Program at the University of British Columbia Hospital, for use in a three-year, 200-person controlled study of bright light therapy.

Dr. Lam says he selected Day-Lights because “they use the latest technology, are of excellent quality, durability and aesthetics, and meet all recommended safety standards. The company also has a track record of dependability.”

16. What is the correct way to use Day-Lights for therapy sessions?

For bright light therapy sessions, you would use your Day-Light each morning for 20-30 minutes or as directed by your physician. To receive 10,000 LUX, you would need to sit approximately 11 to 15 inches from the light with your eyes directed toward the center of the screen with the screen tilted at a 15° angle. During the session, do NOT look directly into the light, but read, eat breakfast or do some paperwork.

17. Why do I need 10,000 LUX?

10,000 LUX for 30 minutes in the morning is what the experts recommend as a starting dosage for bright light therapy. You may need to adjust the duration up or down from the 30 minute starting time, or use the light at a different time of day, depending on your response to treatment. You can also use the same dose of light using a 2,500 LUX system for two hours per day, but this may be far less convenient.

18. Can the Day-Light be used in other ways?

The quality of the light emitted by Day-Lights is very pleasant and they can be used outside the context of bright light therapy. Positioned farther away than for light therapy or directed away from the face, they are excellent ambient or task lights.

19. Does the Day-Light cause tanning?

No, they do not cause tanning because the ultraviolet (UV) rays that cause tanning are filtered out. Medical experts caution using unfiltered bright lights for extended periods of time may eventually cause ocular damage.

20. Are Day-Lights expensive to buy & maintain?

Quality-made, name-brand bright light systems cost between \$200 and \$500. Day-Lights are very competitively priced at the low end of this range and they conform to all design guidelines recommended by medical experts for bright light therapy equipment:

- Day-Lights meet all safety standards (i.e., they are UL & C-UL Listed, and UV filtered).
- Day-Lights emit the optimal 10,000 LUX “dosage” of light.
- Day-Light technology has been used in clinical studies since 1989 and been proven effective.
- Day-Lights use diffusing filters and high efficiency ballasts that eliminate glare and light flicker, which ensures the user’s comfort during bright light therapy sessions.

Day-Lights are warranted for five years (excluding light tubes) during normal use. Light tubes can last many years, but to maintain the 10,000 LUX intensity, it is recommended they be replaced every two years. These are available from your dealer or lighting stores.

21. What if the Day-Light doesn’t work for me?

You will need a one to four week trial period to see if the Day-Light system works for you. Look for vendors who offer either a 30-day money-back guarantee, or a short-term rental program with rent applied to purchase price. Ask vendor for details before purchasing.

22. Where can I get more information?

Our website, www.day-lights.com, or the Center for Environmental Therapeutics (www.cet.org), a not-for-profit professional organization, that offers information and advice from leading experts in the field of bright light therapy.

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DISCLAIMER: Day-Lights are innovative light supply systems and are not listed medical devices in the USA.

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