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Information on Light Therapy

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Not getting enough sunlight can be devastating to your overall well-being. Whether your mood is just a little lower than usual or you fall deep into depression, a light therapy lamp may be able to help. Light therapy lamps affect the chemicals in your brain that are linked to mood and sleep and can reduce symptoms of seasonal depression.

When considering a light therapy lamp, intensity is your primary concern. The brighter a light is, the shorter your sessions will need to be. It is also important that your lightbox filters out harmful UV rays, which can damage your skin and eyes. The ideal light for you will be large enough to be effective, but not too big for your environment. When fall and winter roll around, good moods always seem to be a little harder to come by. The day gets shorter and the weather gets colder, so we spend less time outside in the sun — and that can actually make a big difference in the way we feel. It's called the winter blues for a reason, after all! But whether you've been diagnosed with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), or you're just suffering from general malaise, there are ways to boost your mood when the seasons change.

A light therapy lamp provides artificial light that mimics natural daylight, helping stimulate serotonin production, and lifting your spirits even when the weather's bleak. Finding the right therapy lamp is key for effective results, though, because not all models are the same. It's important to choose a lamp with the right intensity, size, and other features if you want it to see a real difference in the way you feel.

Who needs a light therapy lamp?

Light therapy lamps are often recommended for individuals who experience some type of seasonal depression. The main type is SAD, a form of clinical depression with symptoms that typically start sometime between September and January, and go away when the days become longer in April or May. Symptoms typically include sadness, moodiness, fatigue, weight gain, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. A milder form of seasonal depression is informally known as the "winter blues." The symptoms are similar to SAD but less severe. Up to 25% of people in northern latitudes suffer from some type of winter blues.

Approximately 75% of people who experience SAD or the winter blues are women. SAD usually starts when you're in your early 20s, but it can begin as soon as puberty. It's also believed to be a genetic condition, so if your family members experience the condition, you're likely to as well. In addition to SAD and the "winter blues" light therapy is used to treat non-seasonal depression, jet lag, and dementia.

How does light therapy work?

Light therapy usually involves a box or lamp with fluorescent lights that simulate natural outdoor light. The light typically has a minimum intensity of 2,500 lux, which is the same intensity as a somewhat overcast day.

To use the light, you place the lamp on a surface near where you are sitting, making sure to aim it at your eyes. You shouldn't stare directly into the light, though; it's best to position the lamp so it shines down at your eyes from a slightly elevated angle.

The light from the lamp hits your retina, and nerve impulses are transmitted to the pineal gland to enhance the effectiveness of serotonin and other neurotransmitters, which can help boost your mood. You should sit near the light for anywhere from 15 minutes to 3 hours to see results.

Users often experience results from light therapy in 2 to 4 days, though you usually need up to 3 weeks of treatment for the full benefit.

Features to consider when buy a light box or lamp

Size

Light therapy lamps come in a variety of sizes, which range from small, tabletop models to larger, box style lamps.

Choosing the right size is mostly a matter of preference. Some users don't like big, bulky box styles, but those with larger surface areas usually mean better exposure for your eyes.

If you choose a light therapy lamp that's too small, it may not be as effective.

Intensity

A light therapy lamp's intensity is the main factor in predicting effectiveness. The intensity of the light is measured in a unit called lux, which describes how brightly the light is perceived by the human eye.

Light therapy lights usually fall within a range of 2,500 to 10,000 lux.

For reference, the average rating of home lighting is 50 lux.

When it comes to light therapy lamps, the most common mistake is buying a light that isn't intense enough. Our expert Lauren mentions, "I see people buying lights that are not powerful enough. 10,000 lux is suggested for the quickest treatment."

More intense lights usually have a higher price tag, but your treatment sessions will be shorter.

With a 10,000 lux lamp, you usually only need a 15 to 30 minute session daily.

With an 8000 lux lamp, try for a 45 to 60 minute session every day.

With a 2500 lux lamp, your daily sessions should be 1 to 2 hours.

Full spectrum vs. broad spectrum

Some light therapy lamps utilize full spectrum light, while others feature broad spectrum light.

Full spectrum light features wavelengths ranging from infrared to near-ultra violet, so they tend to have a bluish light. Broad spectrum light doesn't contain UV rays and is whitish in color.

Either type of light can work in a therapy lamp, but as our expert Lauren cautions, "If a full spectrum bulb is used, make sure that UV light is being filtered out." That's because UV rays can burn and damage the skin, which is a side effect no one wants from their therapy lamp.

Timer

It isn't an essential feature, but a built-in timer on your light therapy lamp can come in handy.

The timer can keep track of how long your sessions are, so you don't necessarily have to time it yourself.

If your doctor wants precise numbers tracking the time you spend with the light, the timer also makes it easier to provide accurate records.

Light therapy lamp prices ?

Light therapy lamps vary in price based on their intensity and size, but you can usually expect to pay between **\$30 and \$200**.

For a **small, 2,500 lux** lamp, you can typically expect to spend between **\$30 and \$40**.

For a **small, 7,500 to 8,000 lux** lamp, expect to pay between **\$45 and \$65**. For a **larger** lamp with **7,500 to 8,000 lux**, you'll usually pay between **\$70 and \$90**.

Small, 10,000 lux lamps cost between **\$75 and \$100**, while **larger 10,000 lux** lamps run between **\$100 and \$200**.

Two products to consider : Verilux/ Happy Light \$79.95 (Amazon) (rated very highly by researchers)
Verilux/ Liberty portable\$39.95