

# Light Therapy

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**What it is:** Light therapy is a way to treat seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and certain other conditions by exposure to artificial light. SAD is a type of depression that occurs at a certain time each year, usually in the fall or winter. Generally, most people with SAD begin treatment with light therapy in the early fall, when the days get shorter and it becomes cloudier in many regions of the country. Treatment usually continues until spring, when outdoor light alone is sufficient to sustain a good mood and higher levels of energy.

**Why it works:** Light therapy is thought to affect brain chemicals linked to mood and sleep, easing SAD symptoms. Using a light therapy box may also help with other types of depression, sleep disorders and other conditions. Exposure to the light is thought to substitute for the lack of sunlight, providing light to activate brain chemicals through your eyes.

## Instructions for use:

- Sit 16-20 inches away from the lamp
- Recommended use is first thing in the morning
- Ensure that the transparent plastic rectangle (UV filter) is in place.
- The light should shine on your eyes, you do not need to look directly at the lamp, but you must face the lamp.
- Adjust the angle of the lamp-shade downward so that you can still see both tubes.
- Use the lamp for about 20-30 minutes each day
- Keeping regular sleep/wake-hours and exercising (outdoor when possible) are also very beneficial.
- Improvements are often seen within 2-4 days, and reach full benefits within 2 weeks



## What is available at the CC:

*The Northern Light Desk Lamp* is a top quality bright light therapy product. It delivers bright light by combining fluorescent tubes with a large high-performance parabolic reflector. The lamp only delivers light, not heat, keeping users comfortable. The lamp height and angle are adjustable, allowing you to obtain maximum comfort while enjoying the Northern Light Desk Lamp and decreasing symptoms of seasonal depression. Additionally, the reflector provides decreased bright light without losing intensity.

## How to access it:

If you are a current client at the CC, you can ask your clinician for more information and a demonstration of the unit. It may be possible to integrate light therapy into your clinical work, or practice it between sessions. However, you do not have to be a client of the CC to use light therapy. You can access it the same way you would The Oasis or The Studio. Check-in at the front desk and let them know you are interested in using the lamp for light therapy. You will sign in and leave your JACard. You can access light therapy equipment in The Studio.

## Preparing for Light Therapy:

- Talk to your doctor. If you have a **health problem**, if you have been told you must wear sunglasses in sunlight, or if you have a **history of eye problems**, please consult a health-care professional first. **Medications** such as lithium, melatonin, tetracycline, St. John's Wort, acne creams, creams with retinoic acid and some chemotherapy drugs can make you very **sensitive to light**.
- You can bring a book to read or use the materials in **the Studio** while sitting with the Light Therapy lamp
- For best results, try to use for **20-30** minutes in the **morning** as much as possible.

## Possible Problems

Bright light can cause **eye** and/or **skin irritation** and **headaches**. This is most prevalent in people with blue or green eyes, blonde or red hair, and/or fair or sensitive skin. All these problems are usually resolved by **gradually increasing** use of the lamp. At the first sign of **skin or eye irritation**, **stop** using the lamp and **wait** until the irritation disappears. Then start using the lamp **2 minutes a day**, trying different distances until you establish the greatest degree of comfort. Gradually, over a two week period, you should be able to lengthen your exposure time while shortening the distance until you achieve the original light regimen.