What is Light Therapy?

Light therapy mimics outdoor light and appears to cause a change in brain chemicals linked to mood. It is one of the first line treatments for seasonal affective disorder. It generally starts working in two to four days and causes few side effects. Research on light therapy is limited, but it appears to be effective for most people in relieving SAD symptoms.

What to look for in a light therapy box

Light boxes come in a variety sizes, strengths and prices. The important specifications you should look for to provide the optimal effectiveness, safety and comfort include:

- being successfully tested in peer-reviewed clinical trials
- provide 10,000 LUX of illumination at a comfortable sitting distance (about 23" is optimal)
- fluorescent lamps should have a smooth diffusing screen that filters out UV rays that can be harmful
- lamps should give off white light; full spectrum and blue lights can be harmful to the eyes and produce UV radiation
- light should be projected downward toward the eyes at an angle to minimize aversive visual glare
- smaller is not better: with compact light boxes, even the slight head movements will take the eyes out of the therapeutic range of light