Seasonal Affective Disorder Treatment: Light Therapy versus SSRI Therapy

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Abstract

To determine the effect of pharmacological and nonpharmacological treatments for seasonal depression in college students, we asked the following evidence-based PICO question: In college students (ages 18-25) with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), how does SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor) therapy compared to light therapy affect seasonal depression syndrome? Seasonal affective disorder is synonymously used with the terminology seasonal depression due to the clinical manifestations that encompass depression, such as low energy, feelings of sadness, emptiness, or hopelessness. SAD begins in the fall months and peaks in the winter months due to a decrease in Vitamin D and ultraviolet (UV) ray exposure from the sun. Our search for research articles was conducted by utilizing CINAHL, PUBMed, NLM, Gale Academic Library, and The American Journal of Psychiatry. Chosen articles were required to have been published on or after January 1, 2017. All articles within this review were required to match selected keywords and phrases and published on or after January 1, 2017. Articles that did not meet these requirements were excluded from this study. Eleven articles were selected that fell within the search criteria. The research implicates that light therapy is just, if not more, effective in treating SAD than SSRI therapy. In multiple studies, the conjoined use of the two therapies, light and SSRI, provided the population with the greatest benefit.

Keywords: college students, light therapy, seasonal affective disorder, SSRI, Vitamin D

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