

Light exposure improves depressive symptoms among cancer survivors

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Light therapy decreased depressive symptoms and normalized circadian rhythms among cancer survivors, according to new research from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai presented today at the American Psychosomatic Society in Denver, CO.

Researchers from Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, Northwestern University in Chicago, University of Iowa, University of California in San Diego and Reykjavik University in Iceland randomly divided 54 [cancer survivors](#) into a bright white light or a dim red light group. Participants were provided with a light box and asked to use it for 30 minutes every morning for four weeks. Depressive symptoms and circadian activity rhythms were measured before, during and three months after completing the light exposures to determine the effectiveness of [light therapy](#).

"Depressive symptoms are common among cancer survivors even years after treatment has ended," said Heiddis Valdimarsdottir, PhD, Associate Professor of Oncological Sciences, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and lead author of the study. "This interferes with overall quality of life and puts survivors at risk for poor outcomes including death."

Patients exposed to the bright light experienced improvement in [depressive symptoms](#) while those exposed to the dim red light experienced no change in symptoms.

"Our findings suggest light therapy, a rather non-invasive therapy, may provide an innovative way to decrease depression among cancer survivors," said William Redd, PhD, Professor of Oncological Sciences at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and co-author of the study.

Most patients face some degree of depression, anxiety, and fear when cancer becomes part of their lives. According to the American Cancer Society, 1 in 4 people with cancer have clinical depression.

"The good news is that depression can be treated, and bright light therapy is a potentially effective new treatment option," said Dr. Valdimarsdottir.

Provided by The Mount Sinai Hospital

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