

Wake Therapy Helps Treat Depression

From the Journals

Depression. It's as life threatening as diabetes or cancer. It can attack anyone, anytime without reason. One in five of us will get it, and your chances are twice as high if you're a woman. It will devastate your life and those around you.

Traditional Treatment

Most people 'manage' their depression through therapy and or medication. Relief is rarely complete and medication almost always has unwanted side effects.

Amazing Discovery: From a woman, a bike and Germany

Ursula had battled depression for years. Unable to sleep, she got out and rode her bike all night. In the morning she felt tremendously better. In fact, she couldn't remember feeling this good. Immediately she told her doctor, who was also shocked. Sadly, when she woke up again the next day, her depression had returned.

From Ursula and thousands of others, doctors discovered that depression could be completely reversed, but only for a day. Still the result was nothing short of amazing, and although it only lasted a day, patients felt tremendously better.

Wake Therapy

This treatment, known as wake therapy works like this: You sleep until 1:00 AM. Then you wake up and stay awake all day. As long as you don't sleep, you feel great. You'll be tired, but you'll feel great. As soon as you go back to sleep, the depression returns.

Why didn't it last?

No one knew for sure, so researchers put wake therapy aside. Still, it happened over and over again for thousands of patients. Then a new science emerged, called Chronobiology (the study of how our body clocks work). Scientists discovered we each have a body clock that controls our daily energy and sleep cycles. Our body clocks also control the production of serotonin and melatonin, both substances implicated in depression. When we get depressed, our body clock can be a major factor.

The Long-term Answer

Scientists knew that very bright light was the only effective way to reset our body clocks. So, could they combine bright light and wake therapy for long-term depression relief? In 1996, an Apollo colleague at the University of Vienna did the first trial run. Participants slept until 1:00am and then remained awake for the rest of the night and the next day. Just as before, they felt tremendously better, but anticipated a complete relapse once they fell asleep. Not so this time. When they awoke again, they were exposed to bright light. No depression. It had vanished. Several weeks later it was still gone.

In 2002, Apollo and researchers at UCSD gave it a second try. Same results. Again in 2003, a larger study revealed the same results: Even after months, the depression is gone in most patients! Bright light and wake therapy are now offering an effective, non-pharmacological solution to millions of people like Ursula.