

## **Hollins Research Sheds New Light On Treating Seasonal Affective Disorder**

*First-Ever Comparison Study Finds Light Treatment Superior To Negative Ionization, While Both Therapies Are More Effective, Less Expensive Than Medication*

The National Institutes of Health estimates that each winter, six out of every 100 Americans suffer from debilitating depression and lethargy as well as noticeable weight gain, a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Two non-drug therapies, bright light and negative ionization, have been recognized as options to treat SAD. But until recently, no research had been done to determine which is the most effective.

Randall K. Flory, professor of psychology at Hollins University, just completed a five-year study that was the first ever to directly compare the two therapies. With the help of 74 Hollins students, all female, over the course of five successive Januarys, he found that exposure to a specially designed light box for several hours a day was not only highly effective but also superior to employing a negative ionization “cleaner,” a unit that takes negative ions (which heighten the impact of SAD) out of the air.

“From a clinical standpoint, the study clearly suggests that we have viable treatments for SAD that don’t involve the use of medication,” Flory said, emphasizing that while not as effective as bright light, negative ionization remains a suitable alternative, a conclusion supported by a 1995 Columbia University study.

Flory stated that the non-drug therapies hold other advantages over medication in addition to effectiveness.

“Both bright light therapy and negative ionization have very negligible side effects,” he said, “and they are far less expensive. A quality light box can be purchased for \$300. A negative ionization unit costs about \$120. At the same time, medication for SAD could cost \$50 a month, or \$3000 over a five-year period.”

Flory noted that while virtually everyone’s mood goes through some degree of seasonal changes, women are considered to be four times more likely than men to develop full-blown SAD.

“One-third of the 74 women who took part in the Hollins study suffered from severe SAD,” he said. “It is clearly a hormonally-related syndrome that is almost like a bipolar condition in terms of how dramatically a person’s mood and disposition changes.”

As a subset of his research, Flory also looked at the effects of light treatment on those who experienced premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and SAD simultaneously. One group of test subjects received seven consecutive days of bright light therapy prior to the onset of their menstrual periods, while the other group received a placebo.

“We found that women who suffered from SAD to some degree experienced more distress from the symptoms of PMS,” Flory said. “However, they also achieved meaningful, noticeable relief from exposure to light.”

Flory presented his findings at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Society in Chicago.