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Think Outside The Box

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Natural Therapy

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You have probably heard the saying, “There is no life without light.” Although it is true in a literal sense, since crops can’t grow without light, it is also somewhat applicable to the human psyche.

Natural sunlight is important for our mental health since it regulates our circadian rhythms or wake-sleep cycle. Besides, being exposed to moderate, safe amounts of sunlight, allows your body to release more vitamin D, which helps you feel more positive and alert.

The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "Quiz Time!" in a white, handwritten-style font. Below this, there are three quiz cards, each with a white border and a central image. The first card shows a pair of red roller skates on a wooden deck, with the text "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" below it. The second card shows a fan of colorful pencils, also with the text "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" below it. The third card shows a Ferris wheel at sunset, with the text "Quiz: Flags in Europe" below it. To the right of the cards is a white button with the text "See all quizzes =>" in red.

Are You Feeling SAD?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is characterized by symptoms of depression, in people who otherwise have no mental health problems. The disorder is called “seasonal” because it refers to a sense of fatigue, negativity, and drowsiness, at the time when seasons change.

That is why it is also commonly known under names, such as “the winter blues.” It is believed that SAD occurs, at least to some extent, because of decreased exposure to sunlight, and so light therapy has been proven effective, as part of the treatment.

Light Therapy for SAD and Sleep Regulation

First and foremost, it is important to note that light therapy alone is insufficient. It can, however, be helpful when coupled with psychotherapy or medication. In some cases, light therapy has even been shown to substitute antidepressants effectively, but it always needs to be unified with psychotherapy.

How Does It Work?

In specially equipped rooms, the person going to light therapy is exposed to the intense light, every day, for 1-2 weeks. Most people start the treatment in the morning, which is especially useful for those who are not able to feel alerted before noon.

Another positive aspect of the method is that, if used correctly, light therapy does not have any side effects and is also recommended as a method of prevention.

Who Can Use It?

Light therapy is useful for people who struggle with SAD because it provides intense light, which mimics natural sunlight, and can, therefore, trick your body into producing the melatonin and vitamin D that it may be lacking.

If your circadian rhythm is disrupted, because of shift work, a mental health disorder, or another reason, light therapy can also provide some benefits, when added to psychotherapy and self-help.

Because your sleep-wake cycle is closely affected by a 24-hour cycle of natural light, therapy for disruptions in your sleep pattern can benefit from the use of light as well.

Spend Time Outside

Even in the gloomiest of days, spending time outdoors is still beneficial, to both your physical and mental health. Even though you may not be exposed to direct and bright sunlight, natural light in itself stimulates cognitive activity, which makes relieve clouded thinking, makes you more alert, awake and active.

Nothing Is Better than the Real Thing

Although light therapy, with the use of artificial light, can have similar effects, nothing can be better than the real, natural version. That is why it is important to try and spend at least 30 minutes a day outside.

You can incorporate that time into your daily routine, by walking to school or work, rather than driving, taking your dog out for longer walks, etc.

If for whatever reason you are not able to spend time outdoors, try to stay near a window, when you are inside. If you can, move your desk, your bed, your dining table, etc., closer to where you will receive more natural light.

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