

Medical Affairs Policy & Procedure

Title/Service: Light-Box Phototherapy for Seasonal Affective Disorder

Revised	
Reviewed	10/22/99, 02/25/00, 04/26/02, 01/24/03, 05/28/04, 11/16/07, 05/15/08, 04/24/09, 04/28/10, 09/16/2011
Developed	10/22/99
Policy Committee Approval	09/16/2011

Description:

High-intensity light unit used for the treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Indications of Coverage:

Phototherapy for SAD is considered medically necessary when **all** of the following are met:

- A. The individual has been diagnosed with recurrent major depression or bipolar disorder
- B. Medical record documentation of three or more episodes of seasonal affective disorder for two or more consecutive years. DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition) defines an episode of Seasonal Affective Disorder as beginning in the fall or winter, and remitting in the spring.
- C. Seasonal episodes of depression that substantially outnumber non-seasonal episodes.

Limitations of Coverage:

- A. Review contract and endorsements for exclusions and prior authorization or benefit requirements.
- B. If used for a condition/diagnosis other than is listed in the Indications of Coverage, deny as experimental or investigative.
- C. If used for a condition/diagnosis that is listed in the Indications of Coverage, but the criteria are not met, deny as not medically necessary.
- D. The following devices for the treatment of SAD are considered experimental as there is insufficient peer-reviewed scientific literature supporting their effectiveness:
 - Phototherapy devices emitting less than 2500 lux

- Light visors/light caps
- Eyeglass clips
- Tanning beds
- Dawn stimulators
- LED (light emitting diode) devices

Documentation Required:

- Office notes

Rationale:

SAD is defined as a depressive mood disorder characterized by recurrent seasonal patterns, occurring most commonly in autumn and winter, with remission in spring and summer. The condition, which may affect up to twenty percent of the United States population, produces symptoms so severe that they interfere with the normal functioning of the individual. Various hypotheses for the condition have been proposed, but current research suggests the condition is due to low serotonin levels. Several studies have shown the effectiveness of phototherapy using treatment devices emitting 2500 lux and other studies have shown that devices emitting 10000 lux require significantly reduced daily treatment time. There are no studies regarding the effectiveness of light visors, LED devices, tanning beds, or dawn stimulators for the treatment of SAD.

References:

1. Flory R, Ametepé J, Bowers B. A randomized, placebo-controlled trial of bright light and high-density negative air ions for treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder. *Psychiatry Res.* 2010 May 15;177(1-2):101-8.
2. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Cognitive behavioral therapy for the treatment of seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Updated October 20, 2010. Available at: clinicaltrials.gov/show/NCT00076245. Accessed: 25 Aug 11.
3. No authors listed. Coping with Winter Depression: Tips for Managing Seasonal Affective Disorder. American Psychiatric Association, Arlington VA. Nov 23 2004. Available at: www.psych.org/MainMenu/Newsroom/NewsReleases/2004NewsReleases/sadtipsheet11232004.aspx. Accessed: 25 Aug 11.
4. No authors listed. Practice guideline for the treatment of patients with major depressive disorder. American Psychiatric Association, Arlington VA. April 2000.



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Approved by the Medical Director