

## SEASONAL AFFECTED DISORDER AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Source:

American Health

October 1995

Author: Eleanor Gilman

Doctors have traditionally used medication and bright light to treat patients with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), also known as winter depression. Research at Columbia University shows that treatment with negative ions may also help.

Negative and positive ions (electrically charged atoms) circulate in the air. Some research suggests that warm, humid, summer air contains more negative ions than cool, dry, winter air. Psychologist Michael Terman, director of Columbia's winter depression program and co-author of the study, suspects that a lowering of negative ions causes some people to experience malaise, agitation and sleep disturbance, all symptoms of SAD. Dr. Terman adds that windows, construction materials, computers, clothing fabric, air conditioners and heating systems may also affect negative ion availability.

For years, claims have been made for negative ion therapy in treating a variety of ailments, including cancer, heart disease, respiratory infections and depression, though research was inconclusive. Terman says that in his study, for which he received a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, subjects were exposed to higher levels of negative ions than in previous tests.

For the study, published in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 25 people diagnosed with SAD were randomly assigned generators that dispersed negative ions at either low or high dose levels. The subjects sat about three feet from the apparatus for 30 minutes every morning for 20 days. At the end of the study, 58% of those treated with the higher dose reported remission of depressive symptoms, compared with 15% of those given the lower dose.

More study is needed to determine just how the negative ions work. But Terman says that negative ion therapy seems to be as effective as light therapy or antidepressant medications and may be used instead of or in addition to them. "Sometimes a patient has a partial response to one of the traditional therapies," he says. "Here's a third intervention that can go into the mix to create a powerful treatment."