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Making light of the blues

THOUSANDS of people suffer 'the winter blues'. The affliction does not make them go blue with cold. It causes depression.

Now doctors have a new way to treat SAD (seasonal affective disorder) — light therapy.

The condition strikes in the autumn and goes away in the spring, suggesting that it is related to light deprivation.

In one study, 30 out of 34 SAD patients exposed to ultrabright lights showed a significant improvement.

Dr Alfred Lewy, of the University of Oregon, U.S.A., believes their biological clocks are either gaining or losing time because of abnormal secretion of melatonin, a hormone which has nerve connections to the eye and is sensitive to change in light.

His studies could have implications for the rest of us.

As more is understood about the way light affects body and mind, experts are becoming more disturbed by windowless offices and other innovations which reduce exposure to natural light.

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