What You Need to Know About Magnetic Therapy for Depression

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What Is Magnetic Therapy for Depression?

Magnetic treatment is a noninvasive procedure that can be used to combat depression. Typically, this method is only explored when other treatments have failed.

It is called repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) and uses magnetic fields to stimulate nerve cells in the brain. By doing so, rTMS can improve the symptoms of depression.

Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) has been in use since 1985, but there is not a lot of data available regarding its long-term success.

How Does Magnetic Therapy Work?

Using repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) in the treatment of depression requires several sessions. During these sessions, an electromagnetic coil is placed against your scalp, close to the forehead.

The electromagnet sends magnetic pulses that work to stimulate the nerve cells in the region of your brain involved in mood control and depression. It is believed that rTMS can also activate regions of the brain that have decreased activity levels.

The science behind this method has not been fully explored; therefore, it is not entirely understood how or why the magnetic treatment works.

Why Try Magnetic Therapy for Depression?

Although treatable, severe depression can be difficult to treat. For some, standard treatments are simply not effective. RTMS may be a viable option for those who have tried various medications and therapy options, to no avail.

In some cases, doctors will use rTMS in combination with antidepressants and psychotherapy.

RTMS is not invasive, meaning this procedure is commonly performed in a doctor’s office or clinic. You should be well enough to even drive yourself home following treatment, but this ultimately depends on the individual.

RTMS treatment should not affect your ability to go to work or carry out any of the duties of your normal daily life.

For those who may not be healthy enough to undergo electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), rTMS offers a more viable solution. ECT is often reserved for patients with severe or potentially life-threatening depression, while rTMS is more widely used.

A series of treatment sessions must be performed for rTMS to be effective. Sessions are often scheduled daily, five times per week, for approximately four to six weeks in duration.

Benefits of Magnetic Therapy for Depression

The stimulation of the electromagnetic pulses appears to affect how the targeted parts of the brain are working. As a result, if the regions of the brain responsible for mood control and depression are targeted, rTMS may alleviate the symptoms of depression.

Doctors will most often target the prefrontal cortex region of the brain during treatment for depression. There are some who credit rTMS with dramatically reducing their symptoms, while others claim that it has little to no effect on their condition.

Data compiled from a 2013 study published in *Neuropsychopharmacology* journal found that rTMS treatments made people with major depression more responsive to treatment.

A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* found that people who receive rTMS treatment were five times more likely to experience remission of their symptoms than those who did not receive rTMS treatment.

Risks and Side Effects of Magnetic Therapy for Depression

Unlike vagus nerve stimulation and deep brain stimulation, rTMS does not require surgery or the implantation of electrodes. Also, unlike electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), rTMS does not require the use of anesthesia and comes with a lower seizure risk.

Generally, rTMS is much safer than many other procedures, however, there are side effects associated with rTMS that must be considered.

Side effects are mild to moderate and are known to improve within a short period of time following a rTMS session, decreasing over time with additional sessions. Common side effects may include:

- Headaches
- Tingling, spasms or twitching of the facial muscles
- Discomfort of the scalp, at the site of stimulation
- Feelings of lightheadedness

Although rare, some uncommon but serious side effects may include:

- Seizures
- Hearing loss (if there is inadequate ear protection during treatment)
- Mania (particularly in individuals with bipolar disorder)

Many long-term side effects are unknown; as further research is needed in rTMS treatment.

Does Magnetic Therapy for Depression Really Work?

Just like many treatments used for depression, repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation for depression does not work for everyone. It is important to try medication and therapy options for the treatment of depression prior to considering rTMS, as many people find success using these more traditional methods.

Even if rTMS treatment works for you, symptom relief may take a few weeks before becoming noticeable.

If any of the following statements mirror your own situation, there is a chance that rTMS may not work for you if:

- Your depression has lasted for several years

- Your mental illness includes psychotic symptoms (i.e. detachment from reality)
- Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) has not worked to improve your symptoms of depression

As researchers continue to explore the effects of rTMS, the ultimate success rate of this treatment may be better understood.

If your depression improves with rTMS, but you later find that your symptoms start to return, you can repeat rTMS treatment.

As with any form of therapy or treatment, speak to your doctor about the effectiveness of magnetic therapy for depression and whether it is something that might work in your situation. Open lines of communication between yourself and your doctors will greatly assist in your recovery efforts and keep you safe along the way.