

[IMAGE]

Light at the End of the Tunnel?

Roughly 5% of pregnant women suffer from major depression, which may lead to health risks for the mother and developmental problems in the child. The safety of antidepressant use during pregnancy is uncertain, which has prompted searches for alternative treatments. Preliminary studies on daily bright-light exposure have shown it may successfully treat depression during pregnancy.

Morning bright-light therapy was self-administered by pregnant women suffering from major depression. The subjects underwent one hour of light treatment with a white fluorescent light approximately one foot from their faces, initiated within 10 minutes of waking, for at least three weeks. A depression rating scale was used to evaluate depression levels in this study from the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

Following three weeks of bright-light therapy, average depression ratings in the women improved by about 50%. For women who were followed through five weeks of treatment, an additional improvement to almost 60% over initial scores was observed. Light therapy did not negatively affect pregnancies, although two women experienced nausea as a side effect to therapy. But withdrawal from the light treatment was linked to an increase in depressive symptoms.

This form of treatment needs to be further investigated, but it does suggest that there may be ways to treat depression besides taking antidepressant drugs. In the meanwhile, do your best to avoid taking any drugs while pregnant, perform light exercises at least several times per week, and maintain a healthy diet.

Reference:

Oren DA, Wisner KL, Spinelli M, et al. An open trial of morning light therapy for treatment of antepartum depression. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 2002;159(4), pp. 666-669.

For more information on women's health, go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/find/tellmeabout/women.html>.

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