



Transcranial magnetic stimulation as a treatment for bipolar depression

Introduction

Physical treatments are an important part of therapy for depression for many people. The physical treatments currently available are antidepressant medications and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), both of which are helpful to many people. A third option is transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). This is currently only offered through research studies. TMS can be used before people have tried antidepressants, eg for those who prefer not to take a medication, or for those people who have troublesome side effects with medication or who have not improved with medication.

What is TMS?

TMS stands for "Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation". Strong magnetic fields are used to stimulate the brain via a simple coil held to the head. While receiving stimulation, the person is fully awake and alert. There is no anaesthetic or seizure and memory is not affected. TMS has been used for about 15 years by neurologists to test brain function (e.g. nerve and muscle connections).

TMS as a treatment for depression in Bipolar Disorder

Repetitive rTMS is a potential new therapy for people aged 18 and over suffering from bipolar depression. Strong magnetic fields are used to stimulate the brain through an electromagnet (coil) held to the head. Studies over the last 15 years have found rTMS to be useful in the treatment of depressive illness and to date have found rTMS to be safe in adults with minimal side-effects. The stimulation is non-invasive and is given while the person is fully awake and alert.

TMS is currently being offered as a treatment for depression in Bipolar Disorder in research studies by the University of NSW, at two locations in Sydney: Black Dog Institute (Randwick), and Northside Clinic (North Sydney). The study is particularly suitable for those seeking an alternative to medication or who are unable to tolerate medications. The study is placebo-controlled but all patients have the option of receiving active treatment.

The treatment is being offered to people with Bipolar Disorder who are currently in a depressive episode either as a first-up treatment, or as an alternative treatment to those who have not recovered with or cannot take antidepressant medication. For those interested, enquiries should be directed to:

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<http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/research/participate/index.cfm>

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