



Treatment Information for Clients - rTMS

What is rTMS?

Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) is a non-invasive and well-tolerated form of brain stimulation. rTMS has been approved by Health Canada for the treatment of depression in adults.

How Does it Work?

The treatment involves applying a series of short magnetic pulses to brain regions affected in mental illnesses. The pulses stimulate brain cells in the targeted areas in order to restore healthy activity patterns.

Who Can Benefit from rTMS?

rTMS can be suitable for clients diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder who have not benefitted from at least one antidepressant trial.

rTMS is not suitable for clients who:

- Have a history of epilepsy or other seizure disorder
- Have any ferrous metallic implants in the skull

Side Effects

rTMS is considered a safe and well-tolerated treatment that may cause mild side effects. Side effects tend to be more noticeable at the beginning of the treatment course and usually decrease as clients adjust. The most common side effects include:

- Mild headache
- Painless involuntary contraction of facial muscles during stimulation
- Scalp pain or discomfort at the site of stimulation
- Brief light headedness or dizziness can occur after treatment

In a very small percentage of people (less than 1 in 10,000 clients), rTMS can cause a self-limiting seizure. For this reason, clients with a history of seizure (other than from electro-convulsive therapy) are not eligible for rTMS.

Referral

Clients interested in rTMS must be referred to our services by their physician. A referral form can be supplied by the clinic upon request.

Consultation

Once you have been referred, you will receive a consultation with a psychiatrist in order to determine your eligibility for rTMS treatment.

Treatment Course

A typical course of rTMS consists of five daily treatments per week, occurring Monday through Friday for 4 to 6 weeks. Sessions can range between 10 to 20 minutes. An rTMS technician will administer your treatments.

First Treatment

During your first appointment, a psychiatrist will determine your motor threshold by delivering magnetic pulses to the top of your head. This is a painless procedure used to determine the intensity of your treatment. A technician will take a series of measurements to locate where the stimulation will be applied and will administer your first rTMS treatment. You will be free to leave immediately afterwards.

Follow-up

You will be seen for a follow-up consultation by a psychiatrist at the end of your treatment course or as needed throughout the course of treatment.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I continue taking medications during treatment?

Your medications will be reviewed during your initial consultation with a brain stimulation psychiatrist and must remain consistent over the course of your treatment.

Can I drive home after treatment?

Yes. rTMS will not affect your ability to drive.

How is rTMS different than electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)?

Unlike ECT, clients remain awake during rTMS and do not require anesthesia. Potential side effects of rTMS are much milder than those of ECT.

Is the treatment painful?

rTMS is often described as a tapping sensation on the head. Although it can be initially uncomfortable for some clients, they usually adjust to the sensation after a few treatments and are able to tolerate it well.

Can I attend less than five sessions per week?

No. You must attend all scheduled sessions in order to maximize the effectiveness of your treatment. You may reschedule a treatment if you are sick or unable to come in.

Can I do anything during treatment?

No. Activities such as reading or using cellphones are not allowed during treatments. Clients are encouraged to close their eyes and remain as relaxed as possible during sessions.

What happens at the end of the treatment course?

Once you have completed rTMS, you will meet with a brain stimulation psychiatrist for a follow-up consultation to assess your progress and response to the treatment. This may involve adjusting medications, arranging referrals or discussing other options for non-responders.

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