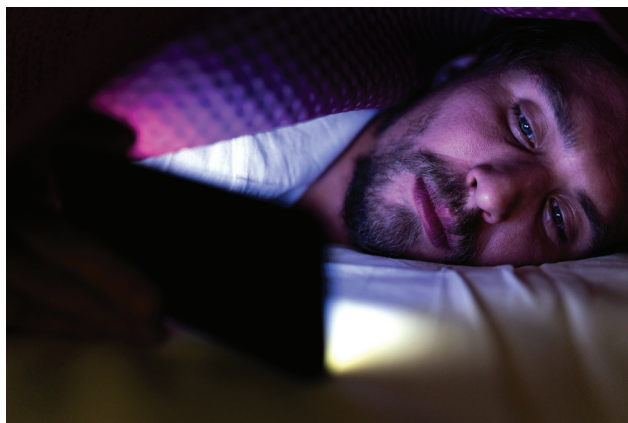


## Out of the blue? How the colour of light could be used to treat mental illness

### Level 1: Elementary

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.



1. How could the behaviour of the person in the picture give them a bad night's sleep?
2. Have you ever felt bad because of a bad night's sleep? What happened?
3. Can the design of a room (light, colour, layout) change how you feel?

#### 2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

conditions

automatically

mental illness

circadian rhythm

lighting

1. \_\_\_\_\_: the light in a place
2. \_\_\_\_\_: a problem with a person's mind or feelings
3. \_\_\_\_\_: works by itself without human control
4. \_\_\_\_\_: the body's natural daily sleep and wake cycle
5. \_\_\_\_\_: the situation or environment around you

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stable

mood

ward

reduce

sensitive

6. \_\_\_\_\_ : easily affected by things
7. \_\_\_\_\_ : not changing a lot
8. \_\_\_\_\_ : how you feel at a time
9. \_\_\_\_\_ : to make something less or smaller
10. \_\_\_\_\_ : a part of a hospital for patients

**b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.**

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ are so good in this company that people love working here.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ in the room is very bright.
3. In the supermarket, the doors \_\_\_\_\_ open and close.
4. I have a very healthy \_\_\_\_\_, and I sleep well every night.
5. He has a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ and knows what can make him feel bad.
6. My sister's in a great \_\_\_\_\_ today.
7. He is \_\_\_\_\_ to bright light, and it hurts his eyes.
8. His condition is now \_\_\_\_\_, and his doctor says he can go home.
9. This medicine can help to \_\_\_\_\_ the pain in your back.
10. She works in a hospital \_\_\_\_\_ with cancer patients.

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*A psychiatric unit in Norway has been testing its built-in lighting on conditions such as psychosis and depression*

**Linda Geddes**  
**13 March, 2026**

- 1 The psychiatric ward in Trondheim looks like a normal hospital unit for people with mental illness. However, in the evening, the lighting changes to a soft amber colour. Doctors want to see how these conditions can help patients to feel better.
- 2 Light is very important for the body. It controls the circadian rhythm, a 24-hour clock that has an effect on sleep. People often have problems like depression and dementia when this rhythm is disturbed. People with mental illness, especially bipolar disorder, often have sleep problems.
- 3 Professor Daniel Smith says people with bipolar disorder are very sensitive to light. In the evening, blue light can delay sleep. It also reduces melatonin, a hormone that helps people sleep. If people sleep badly, their daily routine stops being stable. This can lead to mood problems.
- 4 Because of this, doctors are interested in using light to help with mental illness. They think it can encourage a stable body rhythm and improve their mood. However, there are not many large studies yet.
- 5 In Trondheim, doctors built a new psychiatric unit to test this idea. They installed a special lighting system controlled by time. When it is evening, the system automatically removes blue light. The researchers wanted to change the conditions in the ward to help patients with mental illness.

- 6 The unit has two wards. Both wards have the same design, staff, and facilities. The only difference is the evening lighting. In one, the light changes after 6pm to remove blue light. In the other, the light stays normal.
- 7 The results are interesting. Patients in both wards stay for about three or four days. However, if the patients stay in the ward with special lighting, they have better mood and better behaviour.
- 8 Professor Derk-Jan Dijk says this method is simple for patients. They do not need to use special equipment like light boxes or glasses.
- 9 Researchers also think this idea can help other people. For example, it may help people in care homes, especially those with dementia. Better conditions and improved lighting may reduce anxiety, improve sleep, and make life better without having to use drugs.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if the statements are True or False according to the article.

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| 1. The psychiatric ward in Trondheim uses special lighting in the evening. | True / False |
| 2. Blue light helps people sleep better at night.                          | True / False |
| 3. The circadian rhythm controls the body's daily cycle.                   | True / False |
| 4. Sleep problems are not very common for people with mental illness.      | True / False |
| 5. Patients in wards with special lighting stay for a longer time.         | True / False |
| 6. Poor sleep can affect mood and daily routines.                          | True / False |
| 7. Patients need to wear special glasses in the new ward.                  | True / False |
| 8. Researchers think better lighting can help people in care homes.        | True / False |

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the sentence halves from the article.

1. People often have problems like depression.	a. their daily routine stops being stable.
2. If people sleep badly,	b. the system automatically removes blue light.
3. When it is evening,	c. they have better mood and better behaviour.
4. If the patients stay in the ward with special lighting,	d. when this rhythm is disturbed.

b. Look at the examples in a and complete the rules for the zero conditional using the words below.

comma

if

middle

present

start

when

Zero conditionals explain situations that are always true, such as rules or scientific facts. Both halves of a zero conditional are in (1) \_\_\_\_\_ simple. A zero conditional typically uses the word (2) \_\_\_\_\_ or (3) \_\_\_\_\_, but it can be at the (4) \_\_\_\_\_ or in the (5) \_\_\_\_\_ of the sentence. When it is at the start of a sentence, you have to use a (6) \_\_\_\_\_ to separate the two halves.

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#### c. Complete the zero conditionals using the verbs in brackets.

1. People \_\_\_\_\_ (feel) tired and depressed if they \_\_\_\_\_ (not sleep) well,
2. If your bedroom lights \_\_\_\_\_ (be) too bright at night, that \_\_\_\_\_ (affect) your sleep.
3. When someone \_\_\_\_\_ (have) good sleep, their mood \_\_\_\_\_ (be) better.
4. If people \_\_\_\_\_ (use) phones at night, it \_\_\_\_\_ (reduce) the quality of their sleep.
5. You \_\_\_\_\_ (feel) sleepier when you \_\_\_\_\_ (sit) under soft amber lights.
6. If a medical treatment \_\_\_\_\_ (not need) equipment, more people \_\_\_\_\_ (follow) it.

### 5 Discussion

#### a. Discuss these statements.

- Medicine is the only treatment for mental illnesses that really works.
- All mental illness can be treated by changing someone's environment.

### 6 In your own words

#### a. In groups, discuss how these forms of interior decoration could help people with mental illness.

an organised space



soft furniture



plants around you



a quiet space



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b. Explain to your group the perfect space for your mental well-being. Try and include zero conditionals. Use the examples to help you.

- You feel more ... if you have soft furniture.
- When the space is organised, it makes you ...
- You feel more ... if the space is quiet and calm.
- When there are plants around you ...