



# A New Treatment for Depression: Magnets

## Experimental Therapy Can Treat Depression in Six Weeks

**May. 18, 2005** - For 10 years, Martha Franco was so depressed that she says she couldn't enjoy the smell of flowers or laugh at jokes on TV comedy shows.

"I was suicidal a number of times," she said. "It was like, 'This is not worth it. I can't be in this much misery.'"

Franco, a school administrator from Connecticut, says she often couldn't get out bed.

"I would feel this heaviness, like I had a veil on me," she said, "and I would be carrying a lead apron over my whole body. And I would cry at the drop of a hat."

She tried antidepressants, but nothing worked. Then Franco read about Dr. Sarah Lisanby's experimental treatment at Columbia University Medical Center in New York.

The treatment, called transcranial magnetic stimulation, or TMS, involves applying powerful electromagnets directly to the skull.

The procedure isn't effective for everyone. But "the ability to offer hope and some chance of improvement when other treatments have failed is something really significant," Lisanby said.

### 'Jumper Cable' for the Brain

TMS uses electromagnets to send pulses of energy directly into the left side of the brain, which is thought to control mood. In patients who are depressed, there is often less activity in this part of the brain. The magnets create an electric current and get the brain cells to fire.

"One can think of this as sort of getting a jumper cable and jump-starting your car because your battery has been drained," said Dr. Alvaro Pascual-Leone, who uses the treatment at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

While TMS can cause twitching, doctors say it is safe and painless. Franco says the treatment restored her happiness and saved her marriage.

"The sun seemed brighter, food tasted different," she said. "I mean, I could actually taste food. It was just wonderful."

TMS is still in the research phase and has not been approved by the government for widespread use. Patients are generally treated for a few weeks and, if it works, the depression is staved off for months at a time.

Franco only had to be treated once, but says she would certainly do it again if needed.

"I don't want to get there anymore, ever again," she said, laughing.

*ABC News' Dan Harris filed this report for "World News Tonight."*

*For more information or to be considered for entry in a TMS study, please call the automated phone-screening service toll-free at 1-800-345-8707. The number for the Harvard program is (617) 667-0303.*

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