



# Magnet Treatment Offers Hope for Depression

## Deep Magnetic Brain Stimulation May Help Some with Depression Who Don't Respond to Medication

**Mar. 18, 2005** - Some 19 million Americans suffer from depression, say medical experts, and while drugs go a long way toward fixing chemical imbalances, there are some cases of depression that don't respond to drugs.

Now an experimental treatment that "rewires" the brain through deep magnetic stimulation has given some doctors and patients hope.

### In a Dark Place

Martha, a mother of two who asked that her last name not be used, has experienced depression for more than 20 years. Like many suffering from depression, she is reluctant to discuss her illness because of the stigma attached to it.

She says her depression was often overwhelming. "I cried at the drop of a hat," she said. "The littlest things in life would break me down."

At times, she was unable to function and found that medication and therapy didn't offer much relief. "I was in such a dark place. I could not get over it. I couldn't get myself out," she said.

### Experimental Treatment 'Reboots' the Brain

Martha turned to an experimental form of deep brain stimulation called repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, or TMS. It works by using a powerful pulsating magnet to send a tiny electrical current into the specific part of the brain affected by depression.

Doctors compare the treatment to "rebooting" the brain like a computer, and, hopefully, alleviating the symptoms of the illness.

Martha saw a drastic improvement in her life within weeks.

"It really has changed my life," she said. "I'm happy. I can laugh easily. I can actually watch a comedy show and laugh and really feel the laughter and it feels so good."

### Could Be Used for Other Conditions

If proven safe and effective, doctors hope that TMS also could be used to treat Parkinson's disease and other disorders.

Though the procedure is not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration, Dr. Sarah Lisanby,

who treated Martha at the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University, is optimistic.

"We are at a very exciting time in psychiatry right now," said Lisanby. "We are just scratching the surface about what potential brain stimulation could add to our treatment options."

Martha is a believer in the treatment.

"TMS has really brought me to the point where I can function as a human being," she said. "The world's a much better place I have to say."

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