

# Brain Stimulation: Chapter 33. Treating the depressions with superficial brain stimulation methods (Handbook of Clinical Neurology)

Mark S. George, Joseph J. Taylor, Baron Short

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Many, if not most, of the different superficial brain stimulation methods are being either used or investigated to treat the depressions. There are likely many reasons why there is this much interest and research involving brain stimulation treatments for depression, including that the depressions are common, there is dissatisfaction with other treatments, and some patients do not respond to medications or talking therapies. This is coupled with the fact that depressive episodes are a periodic or temporary state of the brain, and that when patients are no longer in that state they return to normal functioning. Additionally, the oldest brain stimulation method, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), is also the most effective antidepressant available for the acute treatment of depression in patients who do not respond to medications. The newer brain stimulation methods have followed in the path blazed by ECT, showing that stimulation of key regions can cause a change in brain state and treat the depression. After almost 20 years of research, repeated daily repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) of the prefrontal cortex for several weeks is now also an established clinical treatment for acute episodes. The data are less convincing for the other brain stimulation methods, but all are being investigated. Using brain stimulation (as opposed to medications or talking therapy) to treat depression is a rapidly expanding area of research with already established clear indications. Much more work is needed to understand best which methods should be used in any given patient, and in what order.



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