

- Lighting

Feeling blue? Let there be light

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Bright days and dark nights are among the keys to good mental health.

That's the finding of a world-first study looking at the impact of light patterns on psychiatric disorders.

Led by Sean Cain, Angus Burns and Andrew Phillips from the Monash School of Psychological Sciences and the Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health in Melbourne, the study involved light measurements and almost 87,000 people.

Associate Professor Cain said the findings had the potential for a huge impact because the result was so general across psychiatric conditions. Importantly, it found that increasing exposure to daytime light could be a natural way to reduce psychosis risk.

"Major depression, selfharm behaviour, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, they all seemed to benefit from healthy light exposure patterns in the study," he said.

"Once people understand that light exposure patterns have a powerful influence on mental health, they could take some simple steps to optimise their wellbeing," he said.

"Even taking off make-up under bright lights an hour before sleep has an impact.

"The general advice is to get as much bright light during the day as you can – get outdoors. Whenever the sun is out, that light is good for your body clock.

"At night, the room needs to be dark. Young people are particularly sensitive to these effects of light so it's even more important for them."