



TMS for Teens

A thoughtful, physician-led option for adolescent depression

When a teen is struggling with depression, families often do everything they can. They seek therapy, pursue psychiatric care, and try medication thoughtfully and with hope. Sometimes, despite everyone's best effort, the depression is still there. In those situations, families may want to know whether there is another path forward.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, or TMS, is a noninvasive treatment that uses targeted magnetic pulses to stimulate brain circuits involved in depression.

What is TMS?

What parents want to know

- What is TMS?
- Is TMS safe?
- Which teens may be candidates?
- Standard vs accelerated protocols
- Does insurance cover TMS?

During treatment, a magnetic coil is placed lightly against the scalp. The device delivers carefully measured pulses to specific brain regions involved in mood regulation. Teens remain awake during the session. TMS does not require anesthesia, sedation, or a recovery period afterward.

Office-based	Awake during treatment	Targeted stimulation
No anesthesia or sedation	Return to usual activities afterward	Non-medication option

Are there different kinds of TMS?

Yes. TMS is not just one single treatment schedule.

- Standard TMS is the more traditional approach, usually delivered over several weeks. This currently has the clearest adolescent-specific regulatory footing for ages 15–21 as an adjunctive treatment for major depressive disorder.
- Accelerated TMS refers to protocols that deliver multiple sessions in a much shorter period of time. The goal is to shorten the overall course of treatment and, in some cases, help patients improve faster. One well-known accelerated approach is SAINT, also called Stanford Neuromodulation Therapy or SNT.

You may also hear about one-day TMS protocols for depression. These highly compressed approaches are promising, but for teens they are best described as emerging options rather than established standard care.

	Standard TMS	Accelerated TMS
Typical schedule	Usually spread over several weeks	Multiple sessions in a much shorter period (1-5 days)
Teen evidence footing	Strongest current adolescent-specific regulatory support	Promising, but teen use is more individualized
Examples	Adjunctive TMS for ages 15–21 on cleared systems	SAINT / Stanford Neuromodulation Therapy; emerging one-day models

How does treatment feel?

Most patients describe TMS as a tapping sensation on the scalp. The first few sessions can feel unfamiliar, but many adjust quickly. Because there is no anesthesia, teens are awake throughout treatment and can generally return to normal activities afterward.

Is TMS safe?

TMS is noninvasive and generally well tolerated. The most common side effects are temporary scalp discomfort or headache. As with any medical treatment, careful screening and physician oversight are important, especially in adolescents.

Does insurance cover treatment?

Yes, TMS is often covered by insurance providers. A prior authorization request is usually required, but we work with you at all steps during submission. See <https://paloaltotms.com/insurance> for more.

Who may be a good candidate?

- A teen still significantly depressed despite treatment
- Partial or inadequate response to therapy, medication, or both
- Difficulty tolerating medication side effects
- Family interest in a non-drug option as part of comprehensive care

Our approach

At our clinic, TMS is not offered as a one-size-fits-all procedure. We begin with a careful psychiatric evaluation, a review of prior treatment, and a thoughtful discussion with both teen and parent about goals, concerns, and readiness.

Care is led by a Stanford-trained, board-certified child psychiatrist with nearly 20 years of clinical experience and a strong background in both medical treatment and psychotherapy.

Because not every protocol is right for every adolescent, we take an individualized approach, weighing evidence, prior treatment response, family preferences, school demands, and the practical realities of daily life.

A hopeful next step

For the right adolescent, TMS can offer another path forward when depression has not lifted enough with usual treatment. A consultation can help determine whether standard or accelerated TMS may be appropriate.



Stanford-trained • Board-certified child psychiatrist • Nearly 20 years of clinical experience

Call Today (415) 735-4867 • paloaltotms.com