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## Mood palette

### **How can color affect your mood?**

By SHAWN RHEA  
Courier-Post Staff

Green with envy, feeling blue, seeing red, looking at the world through rose color glasses: People have long used the language of color to describe emotions and states of mind. But a practice called color therapy (also known as chromotherapy) promotes the idea that color is more than a great metaphor for emotions and feelings. According to some alternative therapy practitioners, color can actually influence our mental and physical health.

"Color is high-frequency energy in motion," said Dwight Vega, a respiratory therapist and alternative health practitioner in Lyndhurst, Bergen County. "Each color has a specific vibration that has effects on human cells."

### **How color can affect mood**

Vega's assertion may sound a bit new age-y and unproven, but there is some research suggesting color does indeed affect the physical and mental condition.

In the late 1950s, Robert Gerard, a researcher at the University of California in Los Angeles, conducted a series of experiments that involved exposing volunteers to colored lights. He found subjects' blood pressure, respiratory rates, eye movement and sweat increased when exposed to red lighting. Exposure to blue lighting produced the opposite effect.

Gerard surmised that longer wavelength colors (warm tones such as red, yellow and orange) stimulate and excite, while short wavelength colors (blues, greens and purples) calm and relax.

In another experiment, Swiss scientist and color theorist Johannes Itten found color influences perception of temperature. When seated in a room painted in shades of blue and green, research subjects felt cold when the temperature hit 59 degrees. When placed in a room painted in red and orange shades, those same subjects didn't feel cold until the temperature fell to 52 degrees.

Such experiments coupled with anecdotal evidence have led a number of spiritual and alternative therapy practitioners to recommend the use of color for attaining well-being.

"The reason color works as a therapeutic device is because of vibration," said Marlton-based spiritual practitioner Victoria Pendragon. "If I were to show you a wave chart, it would include X-rays, ultra-violet rays, infrared, microwaves and soundwaves. On that chart is color -- it falls right in the middle," said Pendragon.

In fact, a look at a wave chart might explain why certain colors influence humans' physical reactions and atmospheric perception. The color red falls just below infrared on the wave chart, and scientists know humans experience infrared waves as heat.

#### **Notion is not new**

The use of color to promote health is hardly new, however. Long before scientists were conducting color experiments, ancient Egyptians used it to treat depression and give ill patients a sense of well-being.

According to information from the Institute for Chromotherapy, Egyptian physicians would place patients in solarium-type rooms with built-in colored glass panes. When the sun would shine through, the patient's body would be bathed in light reflecting a color thought to help heal a particular ailment.

These days color therapy is practiced in a variety of ways, said Marge Moken, an intuitive therapist who uses several methods. "A lot of times, when we do color therapy we will use stones of certain colors that are related to the chakras," Moken explained. The stones, she said, give off a particular energy that can facilitate spiritual healing, goal achievement and other activities.

Moken also uses a technique called aura photo readings. It involves photographing subjects with a special camera that, according to Moken, captures the colors of a person's aura. The colors that encircle the subject are an indicator of the type of energy he is giving off, say advocates of the technique. Someone surrounded by red, for example, could be feeling excitement, anger or other intense emotions. Green could be an indication of someone going through self-healing or growth.

While little research exists about the use of color in medical treatment, scientists are beginning to look at possible applications. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine -- a division of the National Institutes of Health -- is currently recruiting volunteers for a study to determine which color of light is most effective in stimulating biological functions such as sleep cycle regulation, heart rate, temperature, blood pressure and breathing rate.

#### **Embrace colors now**

But, you don't have to wait for scientific feedback to begin using color to promote emotional healing and affect mood, said Pendragon. "If someone is feeling sad, they want to avoid too much blue or purple," suggested Pendragon. "Grief is equated with violet, and the color to heal (grief) is orange."

A frustrated or angry person would want to use balancing colors such as blue and green to help improve his mood, while someone experiencing confusion or uncertainty would want to use yellows and golds, said Pendragon. "Yellow brings clarity and gold is the color of the intellect -- of wisdom."

Colored crystals, clothing, light bulbs and stained glass are all good ways to expose yourself to color, said Pendragon. You can also paint the walls of your home for more long-term exposure to a particular color's mood-enhancing properties. "It should be in a room where you spend a lot of time," she said.

"I would also recommend someone use a particular color in their sheets and pajamas so they use and come in contact with it in an intimate way," Pendragon added.

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