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Impaired Inhibitory Control in Women Taking Anti-Androgenic Oral Contraceptives – Implications for Anxiety

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Abstract

Women are twice as likely as men to suffer from generalized anxiety disorder. Inhibition is the most studied executive function in anxiety disorders and research has shown that elevated levels of anxiety are related to slower response times on tasks assessing inhibition. The aim of the present study was to compare inhibitory control toward emotional words, including those eliciting anxiety, in naturally cycling women and women taking different kinds of oral contraceptives (OC), androgenic and anti-androgenic OC. A daily diary study was conducted with 89 women. Inhibitory control was measured by an Emotional Stroop task. The results showed that anti-androgenic OC users had slower response times on all the categories of words, compared to androgenic OC users. Further studies should focus on the link between different kinds of OC and inhibitory control as it can be linked to anxiety symptoms in women.