Abstract

Approximately 80% of all women of reproductive age experience psychological and physical changes associated with the premenstrual phase. Cognitive alterations are among the most common complaints. In this context, studies have assessed cognitive performance across the menstrual cycle in healthy women and also in women with premenstrual syndrome (PMS). The main objective of the present study was to review the literature on cognitive function in different phases of the menstrual cycle in women of reproductive age, both healthy and with PMS, in particular premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). We searched MEDLINE and LILACS databases. A total of 27 studies were selected. The studies used heterogeneous methodologies. Most studies suggested that healthy women show small fluctuations in cognitive performance across the menstrual cycle, with low performance scores in the luteal phase for visuospatial and motor skills, attention and concentration, verbal memory, visual memory, working memory, and reaction time. Among women with PMS or PMDD, low performance scores for visuospatial and motor skills, attention and concentration, verbal memory, working memory, reaction time and impulsivity were also detected in the luteal phase. Symptoms observed in PMS/PMDD patients showed low intensity, but greater when compared with healthy women. Evidence indicates fluctuations in cognitive performance in the different phases of the menstrual cycle in healthy and PMS women, with worse performance for women with PMS/PMDD in the luteal phase. However, methodological limitations prevent us from drawing solid conclusions. Further studies are needed to investigate the impact of these cognitive fluctuations on patients’ daily activities.

Keywords

Premenstrual syndrome, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, cognitive functioning, impulsivity, attention, executive functions.