Abstract

Background: The aim of this study is to compare the effectiveness of two exposure procedures on habituation of emotional responses to food stimuli: (a) exposure to external cues (food images) without eating forbidden food (CE) and (b) exposure to external cues eating forbidden food (with purge prevention). The influence of craving-trait and mood state on the habituation process is also studied. Method: Emotional modulation of the defense startle reflex was assessed in 26 women at risk of bulimia nervosa. After four exposure trials, changes in the following variables were measured: (a) food craving-state; (b) physiological measures: heart rate (HR) and skin conductance response (SCR); (c) motivational patterns towards food (defense startle response); and (d) valence, arousal and dominance of the emotional response to food images. Results: After treatment, subjects tended to show non-significantly lower SCR and heart orientation responses (vs. defense responses); defense startle response was also significantly lower. Conclusions: The exposure procedure, the induced emotional state and the number of exposure trials are analyzed.

Keywords

Bulimia nervosa, exposure, emotions, psychophysiology, psychological intervention.