

Research findings

EXPOSURE COMBINED WITH MEDICATION SHOWS GOOD RESULTS FOR SPECIFIC CHILDHOOD PHOBIAS

Citation: Byrne, S. P., Rapee, R. M., Richardson, R., Malhi, G. S., Jones, M., Hudson, J.L., (2015) D-Cycloserine Enhances Generalization of Fear Extinction in Children, *Depression and Anxiety*, DOI 10.1002/da.22356, Wiley Online Library.

WHAT WAS THE AIM?

Although tested in the adult population with good results, the idea of combining the medication D-cycloserine with exposure therapy in children to aid in fear extinction learning for specific phobias had not been tested. We wanted to see if positive results could be replicated in a 6-14 year old age group.

HOW DID WE DO IT?

A double blind test offering the D-cycloserine medication or a placebo was offered to 35 children aged between 6 and 14 before they received a single prolonged exposure session to their feared stimulus (i.e. either a spider or dog). A week later the children were exposed to a different stimulus (i.e. a different spider or dog). Avoidance and fear were measured via verbal report as the children moved closer to their feared stimulus.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

The children who had consumed D-cycloserine reported less fear and were better able to cope with their feared stimulus compared with those children who took the placebo.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

Between 2-9% of young people develop a specific phobia. These findings mean that common fears, such as spiders, dogs, heights and flying may be treated more effectively for those children who combine D-cycloserine with exposure therapy. In clinical practice, the medication may be useful to improve engagement and motivation in therapy therefore providing a better chance of being anxiety free after treatment ends.

FIND OUT MORE

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