

Red Bull additive taurine improves symptoms of young people suffering first episode psychosis

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New research presented at this year's International Early Psychosis Association (IEPA) meeting in Milan, Italy (20-22 October) shows that supplementation with taurine (well known as an additive found in drinks such as Red Bull) improves symptoms in young people suffering a first episode of psychosis (FEP). The study is by Dr Colin O'Donnell, Donegal Mental Health Service, Letterkenny, County Donegal, Ireland, and Professor Patrick McGorry and Dr Kelly Allott, Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, Parkville, VIC, Australia, and colleagues.

Taurine is an amino acid naturally occurring in the body that has various functions, including aiding the function of the cardiovascular system. It exhibits an inhibitory neuro-modulatory effect in the nervous system and also functions as a neuroprotective agent. It is also involved in development of the nervous system. For all these reasons, it was chosen as an interesting substance to study for potential treatment of psychosis. In this new study, the authors analysed the efficacy of taurine supplementation in improving both symptoms and cognition in patients with FEP.

A total of 121 patients (aged 18-25 years) with FEP, taking low dose antipsychotic medication, and attending Orygen's early intervention services in Melbourne agreed to take part in the study. Patients received taurine 4 grams or placebo once daily. A scoring system called BPRS

(Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale) was used to assess symptoms, and a different tool called MCCB (MATRICS consensus cognitive battery) was used to assess cognition.

A total of 86 patients (47 receiving taurine and 39 placebo) were included in the final analysis. Taurine was found to be both safe and well tolerated. Taurine significantly improved symptoms on the BPRS scale, both in overall score and the part specifically analysing psychosis. There were also improvements in depression symptoms (rated by the Calgary Depression Scale for Schizophrenia [CDSS]) and general overall functioning (including social and workplace functioning). However, there was no difference between groups regarding cognition.

The authors conclude: "Although taurine supplementation did not improve cognition, it appears to improve core symptoms and depression in patients with FEP. The use of taurine warrants further investigation in larger randomised studies, particularly early in the course of psychosis."

The authors are planning further studies to examine the potential benefits of taurine both alone and in conjunction with other supplements in the treatment of psychosis.

Provided by International Early Psychosis Association

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