

# Administration of testosterone may help with exposure therapy for those with social anxiety disorder

November 9 2023

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Credit: Jill Burrow from Pexels

People with social anxiety disorder who receive exposure therapy may potentially benefit from testosterone administration. This is the conclusion of research by Moniek Hutschemaekers, who will be defending her Ph.D. thesis at Radboud University on 10 November.

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) can be crippling—people suffering from SAD experience a lot of fear in social situations. Hutschemaekers says, "People are afraid of being rejected or laughed at by the people they know, or they're afraid that people won't like them. As a result, they avoid [social situations](#)."

Exposure therapy is an effective way to reduce these symptoms. In this form of behavioral therapy, patients are exposed to the things they fear and learn to cope with them. However, exposure therapy is ineffective for 40%–50% of people. The main reason for this is that people continue to avoid the situations in question, and as long as they do, their anxiety levels cannot decrease, and they cannot practice new behaviors.

Hutschemaekers says, "Experimental research has shown that administering testosterone can help people break through social avoidance. We investigated whether testosterone could also help in exposure therapy itself."

Women suffering from SAD were administered a liquid containing testosterone or no testosterone (placebo). They were then asked to give a presentation in front of a therapist and a small audience: something that is usually a nightmare for people with SAD. Hutschemaekers states, "We found evidence that administering testosterone affected anxiety levels during these exposure sessions. In particular, people with high avoidance seemed to benefit from testosterone administration."

This single testosterone dose did not yet lead to a visible effect on SAD itself. Anxiety symptoms did not diminish after administration compared

to the [placebo group](#), but the process of [exposure therapy](#) was different in some cases. "We saw that testosterone does do something during [therapy sessions](#)," says the researcher. "The study findings give a very tentative indication that testosterone affects processes that are important for therapy."

The research is still in its infancy. Hutschemaekers says, "More research is needed to test whether testosterone can actually improve the effect of therapy. But it seems that testosterone can be a valuable addition."

Provided by Radboud University

Citation: Administration of testosterone may help with exposure therapy for those with social anxiety disorder (2023, November 9) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-administration-testosterone-exposure-therapy-social.html>

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