Medical Xpress

People with anhedonia do experience pleasure, just not as often

December 7 2017

Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

Put bluntly, a hedonist is a bon vivant, or at the very least somebody whose highest priority is to enjoy life. If you suffer from anhedonia – the opposite of this – then you are in an unenviable position. During her PhD research, Vera Heininga studied anhedonic young people with the help of smartphones: her conclusion is that these people are definitely

capable of 'experiencing positive emotions." However, they are not very good at keeping these emotions stable. Heininga defended her doctoral thesis on Monday 4 December at the University of Groningen. Her research was funded from the NWO Talent Scheme.

The reduced ability to experience pleasure is one of the key symptoms of a depressive disorder, but it often occurs in other psychiatric disorders as well. Almost twenty percent of people have at least experienced such an anhedonic period ("I don't like anything') during adolescence. This can cause major limitations in their daily functioning: as soon as the 'reward system' in the brain exhibits glitches, a wide range of problems can occur. Although anhedonia is quite prevalent, its nature and cause are far from clear.

Heininga: "A 'pleasurable experience' can be subdivided into phases: an appetitive phase (of appetite or longing), a consummatory phase (consuming) and an appeasing phase (satisfying desire). You can want chocolate or crisps, enjoy consuming these and note that your desire for food has been satisfied. However, I should also state: you do not always have to complete the entire cycle. Each of the individual phases can give pleasure…"

Questionnaire

For her research, Vera Heininga did not use the standard one-off questionnaires, but instead studied a person's mood at different moments of the day. Almost 140 young adults (about half of whom were suffering from anhedonia) completed the questionnaire three times per day on their smartphone. Most of the results concurred with those from traditional studies, but Heininga's research also led to new insights. "Anhedonia does not always lead to less pleasure than other people experience. Equally, it does not always lead to a negative spiral of little pleasure and little motivation."

Heininga's research was part of the larger study "No Fun No Glory" led by Tineke Oldehinkel (Vici), in which the effect of 'pleasure feelings' for a personalised tailored lifestyle advice, in combination with a skydive, are being explored.

A better understanding of anhedonia could lead to improved treatment methods for the disorder. Based on this study, the research method used appears to be a highly promising approach for gaining a better understanding of anhedonia.

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

Citation: People with anhedonia do experience pleasure, just not as often (2017, December 7) retrieved 26 April 2024 from
https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-people-anhedonia-pleasure.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.