

Rumination, distraction and mindful self-focus: effects on mood, dysfunctional attitudes and cortisol stress response.

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Source

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:

Although aggravating effects of rumination on dysfunctional cognitions and endocrine stress responses have been proposed, experimental studies testing these assumptions are lacking. In parallel, mindfulness theory suggests beneficial effects of mindfulness on dysfunctional cognitions. This study aimed to investigate the effects of induced rumination, distraction and mindful self-focus on mood and dysfunctional attitudes and to assess the possible impact of induced rumination on participants' cortisol responses.

METHOD:

Sixty university students were subjected to negative mood induction and subsequently randomly assigned to a rumination, distraction or mindful self-focus condition. The latter included statements focusing on self-acceptance and awareness of the breath. Four saliva cortisol samples were selected during the session.

RESULTS:

Compared to induced rumination, distraction showed a clear beneficial effect on the course of dysphoric mood, whereas a mindful self-focus did not. In contrast to distraction and mindful self-focus, participants induced to ruminate showed significant increases in dysfunctional attitudes from baseline to post-induction. Although rumination was not itself linked to higher cortisol responses, participants scoring high on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)-II who were induced to ruminate showed a smaller decrease in cortisol levels than those scoring low on the BDI-II.

CONCLUSIONS:

This study indicates that rumination as a dysfunctional mode of cognitive processing is able to maintain depression-linked dysfunctional thought content. Furthermore, our study revealed preliminary indications for a link between induced rumination and the cortisol stress response in vulnerable individuals.

PMID:

18485265

[PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]