

Abstract

Effects of oxytocin on positive and negative behavior in a social context

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On a neurobiological level, the positive effects of social relationships on health might be mediated through activity of the neuropeptide oxytocin. Oxytocin has been related to attachment behavior and stress reduction in animals and in humans. In line with this, previous data from our laboratory indicate that intranasal oxytocin modulates communication behavior and cortisol levels during couple conflict. However more recently, differential effects of oxytocin with regard to sex, social context and individual relationship experiences have been proposed and mandate a more refined interpretation of the overall effects of this neuropeptide.

The focus of the presentation will be on recent findings regarding the neuroendocrine underlying factors of close social relationships, particularly couple relationships. Data from both experimental and ambulatory monitoring studies will be presented and methodological issues and (yet) unanswered questions will be discussed.