

The Impact of Obstructive Sleep Apnea on Cognitive Function during REM Sleep in Adults

Daniel P Cardinali*

Department of Medicine, UCA Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina Buenos Aires, Argentina

DESCRIPTION

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is a prevalent sleep disorder characterized by repeated interruptions in breathing during sleep. While the impact of OSA on overall cognitive function has been extensively studied, its specific association with cognitive performance during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is a topic gaining increasing attention. REM sleep is a crucial phase in the sleep cycle, associated with vivid dreaming and essential cognitive functions. Understanding how OSA affects cognitive performance during REM sleep is vital for unraveling the intricate relationship between sleep disorders and cognitive health.

The basics of obstructive sleep apnea

OSA occurs when the muscles in the throat relax excessively during sleep, leading to partial or complete blockage of the airway. This results in disrupted breathing patterns, with individuals experiencing pauses in breathing, known as apneas, which can last for seconds to minutes. The recurrent drops in blood oxygen levels and disruptions in sleep architecture contribute to the numerous health issues associated with OSA, including cardiovascular problems, daytime fatigue, and cognitive impairment.

REM sleep and cognitive function

REM sleep is one of the sleep stages characterized by rapid eye movements, vivid dreaming, and heightened brain activity. It plays a crucial role in memory consolidation, emotional regulation, and overall cognitive function. During REM sleep, the brain processes and integrates information from the day, contributing to learning and memory. Research suggests that OSA may specifically impact cognitive performance during REM sleep, exacerbating the cognitive deficits observed in individuals with OSA. Studies using polysomnography, a comprehensive sleep study, have shown that OSA-related disturbances are more pronounced during REM sleep compared to other sleep stages. The repetitive awakenings and oxygen desaturations during

REM sleep interfere with the consolidation of memories and the restoration of cognitive function.

Cognitive impairments associated with OSA during REM sleep

Memory consolidation: OSA during REM sleep has been linked to deficits in the consolidation of declarative and procedural memories. The interruptions in breathing and sleep fragmentation disrupt the normal progression of memory processes, affecting the encoding and retrieval of information.

Executive function: Executive functions, responsible for planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, can be compromised by OSA during REM sleep. Impaired executive function may contribute to difficulties in daily activities, work-related tasks, and interpersonal relationships.

Attention and alertness: OSA-related disruptions in REM sleep can lead to daytime sleepiness, reduced alertness, and impaired sustained attention. This can manifest as difficulty staying focused on tasks, increased reaction times, and an elevated risk of accidents.

Mood and emotional regulation: REM sleep is crucial for emotional regulation, and OSA during this stage may contribute to mood disturbances such as irritability, anxiety, and even depression. The interplay between sleep quality, emotional processing, and cognitive performance underscores the complexity of OSA's impact on mental health.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between OSA during REM sleep and cognitive performance in adults is a multifaceted interplay that requires further investigation. Recognizing the specific cognitive impairments associated with OSA during REM sleep is essential for developing targeted interventions and treatment strategies. As our understanding of this intricate relationship deepens, clinicians and researchers can better address the cognitive consequences of OSA, ultimately improving the quality of life for individuals affected by this prevalent sleep disorder.

Correspondence to: Daniel P Cardinali, Department of Medicine, UCA Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina Buenos Aires, Argentina, E-mail: Cardinali@gmail.com

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