Emetophobia: Facing the Fear of Vomit

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Emetophobia

Emetophobia is defined as a fear of vomiting and has been cited as one of the least understood anxiety disorders.

(Boschen, 2007; Maack, Deacon & Zhao, 2013; Marks, 1987)
Emetophobia

• Prevalence Rates
  6-7% for women; 1.7-3.1% for men
• Chronic Problem
• Early Onset
• Clinically Significant Distress & Impairment

Limited available empirical research

(Hunter & Antony, 2009; Philips, 1985)
There is a lack of specific examination of the cognitive factors involved in fear of vomiting.

Consequently, no incorporation of cognitive techniques into treatment packages specifically tailored for emetophobia

(Hunter & Antony, 2009; Boschen, 2007)
Preliminary Research

*Not* a rare condition seen in clinical practice

*Overall, conceptualization in early stages*

(Maack, Deacon, & Zhao, 2013; Veale & Lambrou, 2006)
Evidence-based Treatment (EBT)

- Exposure-based interventions first-line treatments of choice
  
- **Substantial** support for exposure therapy for many specific phobias

\[\textit{Despite efficacy data, small minority of therapist actually deliver exposure therapy for anxiety}\]

(Powers & Deacon, 2013)

(Becker, Zayfert, & Anderson, 2004; add all)
Single Subject Case Study

- “Victoria”
- 30, single, self-referred
- Presented *initially* to therapy with generalized anxiety
  - Later, shared a fear of vomit
Etiological & Maintaining Factors

"CBT Model"
- General predisposition to anxiety
- Somatization vulnerability
- Catastrophic misappraisal
- Hypervigilance
- Vomit attributions
- Nausea avoidance
- Selective confirmation

"Victoria"
- Generalized worry
- Gastrointestinal
- Fear of dying
- Monitor others
- Avoid word “vomit”
- Fear of pregnancy
- Failure to habituate

(Boschen, 2007)
Triggers & Avoidance

• Internal & External Cues

• Diverse Range
  • Cognitive to behavioral/contextual

(Bouman & van Hout, 2006; Lipsitz et al., 2001; van Hout & Bouman, 2012; Veale & Lambrou, 2006)
Impaired Functioning - QOL

• Significantly impairing functioning
  – Work
    • Social gatherings
  – Home
    • Relationship with significant other
    • Avoidance of pregnancy
Assessment

• Multimodal assessment
  – Fear of Vomiting Questionnaire (FOV) & the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire 4\textsuperscript{th} Edition (GADQ-IV).

• Flexibility in differential diagnosis
  – GAD $\rightarrow$ specific phobia
  – Treatment shifted to focus on primary disorder
# Hierarchy of Emetophobia-Related Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situations</th>
<th>SUDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeing a person vomit (e.g., either in person or on television/movie)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing or hearing people become sick (e.g., talk about being sick, look pale or ill)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to a place or doing an activity where she may see a person vomit (e.g., bars)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing someone vomit, smelling vomit</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking more than two alcoholic drinks in one sitting</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to a place where she saw someone vomit (e.g., bars, airplanes)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying the words <em>vomit, throw up, barf, puke</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being around someone who has taken illegal substances</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using public transportation during the night</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing YouTube videos of a person vomiting far away from the camera</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling on an airplane or boat</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing YouTube videos of a baby vomiting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark places where escape is difficult (e.g., movie theaters)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using public transportation during the daytime</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to IKEA without a map</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going some place that is unfamiliar</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: SUDs = Subjective Units of Distress Scale.*
Course of Treatment

• Psychoeducation

• Graded Exposure
  – Imaginal, in-vivo, loop-tape
  **Highlight**: exposure to real vomit

• Flexibility
  – Therapist tolerance
  – Supervision
Emetophobia Questionnaire (EmetQ)

Vomit Phobia Index (VPI)

Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ)

Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS)
Limitations of Case Study

- No follow up data
- Client herself did not vomit

Importance of replicating successful treatment using exposure therapy in multiple trials

(Maack et al., 2013)
Discussion

• *How* do you provide exposure-in-vivo?
  – Level of disgust; therapist tolerance
  – Resistance from clinicians
    • Impact on research
    • Development of EBTs
    • Underutilization of exposure-based therapies
      – May not give clients most efficacious treatment
Discussion cont..

• Technology
  • Creativity
  • Bridge middle-level SUDS tasks and high-level
  • Video exposures at home between sessions

• Comorbidity
  • Impact treatment

• Utilize self-reports
  • Track treatment progress

• Psychoeducation
References


