



Review

Neuroimaging and neuromodulation approaches to study eating behavior and prevent and treat eating disorders and obesity



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ABSTRACT

Functional, molecular and genetic neuroimaging has highlighted the existence of brain anomalies and neural vulnerability factors related to obesity and eating disorders such as binge eating or anorexia nervosa. In particular, decreased basal metabolism in the prefrontal cortex and striatum as well as dopaminergic alterations have been described in obese subjects, in parallel with increased activation of reward brain areas in response to palatable food cues. Elevated reward region responsivity may trigger food craving and predict future weight gain. This opens the way to prevention studies using functional and molecular neuroimaging to perform early diagnostics and to phenotype subjects at risk by exploring different neurobehavioral dimensions of the food choices and motivation processes. In the first part of this review, advantages and limitations of neuroimaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT), pharmacogenetic fMRI and functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) will be discussed in the context of recent work dealing with eating behavior, with a particular focus on obesity. In the second part of the review, non-invasive strategies to modulate food-related brain processes and functions will be presented. At the leading edge of non-invasive brain-based technologies is real-time fMRI (rtfMRI) neurofeedback, which is a powerful tool to better understand the complexity of human brain-behavior relationships. rtfMRI, alone or when combined with other techniques and tools such as EEG and cognitive therapy, could be used to alter neural plasticity and learned behavior to optimize and/or restore healthy cognition and eating behavior. Other promising non-invasive neuromodulation approaches being explored are repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) and transcranial direct-current stimulation (tDCS). Converging evidence points at the value of these non-invasive neuromodulation strategies to study basic mechanisms underlying eating behavior and to treat its disorders. Both of these approaches will be compared in light of recent work in this field, while addressing technical and practical questions. The third part of this review will be dedicated to invasive neuromodulation strategies, such as vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) and deep brain stimulation (DBS). In combination with neuroimaging approaches, these techniques are promising experimental tools to unravel the

Abbreviations: 5-HT, serotonin; aCC, anterior cingulate cortex; ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; AN, anorexia nervosa; ANT, anterior nucleus of the thalamus; BAT, brown adipose tissue; BED, binge eating disorder; BMI, body mass index; B N, bulimia nervosa; BOLD, blood oxygenation level dependent; BS, bariatric surgery; CBF, cerebral blood flow; CCK, cholecystokinin; Cg25, subgenual cingulate cortex; DA, dopamine; daCC, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex; DAT, dopamine transporter; DBS, deep brain stimulation; DBT, deep brain therapy; dlPFC, dorsolateral prefrontal cortex; DTI, diffusion tensor imaging; dTMS, deep transcranial magnetic stimulation; ED, eating disorders; EEG, electroencephalography; fMRI, functional magnetic resonance imaging; fNIRS, functional near-infrared spectroscopy; GP, globus pallidus; HD-tDCS, high-definition transcranial direct current stimulation; HFD, high-fat diet; HHb, deoxygenated-hemoglobin; LHA, lateral hypothalamus; lPFC, lateral prefrontal cortex; MER, microelectrode recording; MRS, magnetic resonance spectroscopy; Nac, nucleus accumbens; OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder; OFC, orbitofrontal cortex; O₂Hb, oxygenated-hemoglobin; pCC, posterior cingulate cortex; PD, Parkinson's disease; PET, positron emission tomography; PFC, prefrontal cortex; PYY, peptide tyrosine tyrosine; rCBF, regional cerebral blood flow; rtfMRI, real-time functional magnetic resonance imaging; rTMS, repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation; SPECT, single photon emission computed tomography; STN, subthalamic nucleus; tACS, transcranial alternate current stimulation; tDCS, transcranial direct current stimulation; TMS, transcranial magnetic stimulation; TRD, treatment-resistant depression; tRNS, transcranial random noise stimulation; VBM, voxel-based morphometry; vlPFC, ventrolateral prefrontal cortex; vmH, ventromedial hypothalamus; vmPFC, ventromedial prefrontal cortex; VN, vagus nerve; VNS, vagus nerve stimulation; VS, ventral striatum; VTA, ventral tegmental area

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intricate relationships between homeostatic and hedonic brain circuits. Their potential as additional therapeutic tools to combat pharmacorefractory morbid obesity or acute eating disorders will be discussed, in terms of technical challenges, applicability and ethics. In a general discussion, we will put the brain at the core of fundamental research, prevention and therapy in the context of obesity and eating disorders. First, we will discuss the possibility to identify new biological markers of brain functions. Second, we will highlight the potential of neuroimaging and neuromodulation in individualized medicine. Third, we will introduce the ethical questions that are concomitant to the emergence of new neuromodulation therapies.

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Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Utility of neuroimaging to investigate eating behavior and elucidate risk and maintenance factors for weight gain and eating disorders: towards new phenotyping and prevention strategies	3
2.1.	Predicting future weight gain and maintenance on the basis of neural responsivity and functioning	3
2.1.1.	Reward surfeit and incentive sensitization theories of obesity	3
2.1.2.	Reward deficit theory of obesity	4
2.1.3.	Inhibitory control	4
2.1.4.	Theoretical implications and future research directions	5
2.2.	Dopaminergic imaging	5
2.2.1.	Nuclear tomographic imaging	5
2.2.2.	Genetic fMRI	7
2.2.3.	Future directions for dopaminergic imaging	7
2.3.	The contribution of functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS)	7
2.3.1.	Brief overview of the principles, advantages and limitations of fNIRS	7
2.3.2.	Application of fNIRS for mapping human cortical responses in the context of food stimuli/intake and eating disorders	10
3.	Non-invasive neuromodulation approaches: recent developments and current challenges	10
3.1.	Real-time fMRI neurofeedback and cognitive therapy	10
3.1.1.	Introduction to neurofeedback in cognitive reappraisal	10
3.1.2.	Cognitive reappraisal, obesity, and eating disorders	10
3.1.3.	Proof-of-concept for the use of rtfMRI neurofeedback with cognitive reappraisal for the regulation of food intake behavior	12
3.1.4.	Consideration for rtfMRI neurofeedback experiments targeting disorders of ingestive behavior	12
3.2.	Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) and transcranial direct-current stimulation (tDCS)	13
3.2.1.	Introduction to TMS and tDCS	13
3.2.2.	Summary of clinical studies to modify eating behavior and eating disorders	15
3.2.3.	Future needs: from empirically-driven studies to rational and mechanistic approaches	15
4.	Invasive neuromodulation strategies: recent developments and current challenges	16
4.1.	Overview of the peripheral neuromodulation strategies in the context of food intake and weight control	16
4.1.1.	Changes in vagal signaling during obesity	16
4.1.2.	Effects of vagal stimulation	16
4.1.3.	Effects of vagal blockade	17
4.2.	State of the art of deep brain stimulation (DBS) and its potential for tackling obesity and eating disorders	17
4.2.1.	Overview on the state of the art in DBS	17
4.2.2.	Recent DBS innovations and emerging DBS therapies	18
4.2.3.	Applicability of DBS in the context of obesity and eating disorders	18
5.	General discussion and conclusions: the brain at the core of research, prevention and therapy in the context of obesity and eating disorders	19
5.1.	Towards new biological markers?	19
5.2.	Neuroimaging and neuromodulation in the scope of personalized medicine	20
5.3.	Ethics related to novel diagnostic and therapeutic tools	22
5.4.	Conclusion	22
	Acknowledgments	22
	References	23

1. Introduction

A recent study estimated the number of overweight adults in the world as roughly 2.1 billion in 2013 (Ng et al., 2014). In the United States alone, obese individuals have 42% higher health care costs than those with healthy-weight (Finkelstein et al., 2009). Obesity is on the rise, with severe obesity rising at a particularly alarming rate (Flegal et al., 2010; Finkelstein et al., 2012). Because obesity is a multifactorial condition with a complex etiology, and because success of interventions is subject to a large interindividual variability, there is no panacea or “one-fit-all” treatment for obesity. Bariatric surgery (BS) is the treatment of choice for severe obesity due to its effectiveness compared to

behavioral and pharmacological interventions (Buchwald and Oien, 2013). Its utility and success rate is widely accepted. However, 20–40% of those who undergo BS fail to lose sufficient weight (Christou et al., 2006; Livhits et al., 2012) or regain significant weight after treatment (Magro et al., 2008; DiGiorgi et al., 2010; Adams et al., 2012), and can experience a number of complications during and after surgery or medical and psychiatric comorbidities (Shah et al., 2006; Karlsson et al., 2007; DiGiorgi et al., 2010; Bolen et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2014). In addition to existing methods such as BS, which annually helps thousands of people worldwide, there is a clear need for novel approaches to obesity prevention and treatment, including the development of novel diagnostic and phenotyping methods, as well as adjunctive therapies

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