

Resting Energy Expenditure in Anorexia Nervosa: A Case Report in Two Monozygotic Twins

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2. Keywords

Energy expenditure; Fat mass; Fat-free mass; Anorexia nervosa; Monozygotic twins

1. Abstract

Introduction: Little is known about resting energy expenditure (REE) in patients with anorexia nervosa (AN) during refeeding and after recovery, due to the metabolic, body composition and physical activity changes.

Methods: We present the case of a young female AN patient followed for 6 months during refeeding and her monozygotic twin sister, currently healthy after having recovered from anorexia nervosa

5 years ago. We measured their REE and respiratory quotient by indirect calorimetry, and their body composition by bio-impedance analysis.

Results: After 6 months of refeeding the AN patient gained 4.6 kg of fat mass (FM) and lost 3.3 kg of fat-free mass (FFM), resulting in no weight gain and a decrease of REE compared to the baseline. Her twin sister showed a progressive increase of both FFM (2 kg) and FM (1.5 kg), however her REE stayed unchanged and lower than predicted.

Conclusion: This case highlights the negative impact of hyperactivity on body weight control during the treatment of AN and calls the attention to the association between fat-free mass and REE in former AN patients. The atypical low mREE we assessed, implies the role of other factors than fat-free mass in determining energy expenditure, and underlines the importance of measuring it to accurately define the individual caloric requirements.

3. Introduction

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is characterized by restricted energy intake, an intense fear of gaining weight and disturbed body image. Severe food restriction causes changes in energy metabolism and body composition, with a loss of both fat mass and fat-free mass, the latter being one of the major determinants of resting energy expenditure (REE) [1]. Patients diagnosed with AN have been shown lower REE compared to individuals with normal body weight or constitutionally thin [2, 3]. However, after weight restoration, REE of recovered-anorexic patients was found to be comparable to those of control subjects [4].

This case reports the evolution of REE and body composition in a young AN patient after 3 and 6 months of refeeding, as well as the relationships between these parameters, compared to those of her monozygotic twin sister, currently healthy after having recovered from AN.

4. Materials & Methods

A 27-year-old woman was admitted to the psychiatric day hospital for an evaluation and was diagnosed with a restrictive type AN. Her body weight was 39.5 kg, with a body mass index (BMI) of 15.4 kg/m², and a weight loss of 6 kg in the last 10 months. The patient presented amenorrhea, a pronounced body image disorder and a relatively intense physical activity (2 to 3 hours walking per day).

During teenage years, a previous medical care to restore her weight resulted unsuccessful, because of an absence of a concomitant psycho-behavioral therapy.

The patient was submitted to a multidisciplinary psychiatric and psychotherapeutic outpatient care, individually and in group, for one year. It was found that, this anorexia was part of a global complex of an anxiety-depressive disorder, focused in particular on her professional environment. The patient took part in the treatment program for 6 months. The AN patient has a monozygotic twin sister,

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who suffered of AN between the age of 13 and 23 years old. The twin sister is currently healthy and has an active lifestyle. During the 6 months we followed them up, she intensified the amounts and types of physical exercise and increased energy intakes from 1800 kcal/d to 2500 kcal/d. We measured their REE by indirect calorimetry (Q-NRG®, Cosmed, Italy), and their body composition using 50 kHz tetrapolar bioelectrical impedance analysis (Nutriguard®, Data Input, Germany) one week, three and six months after the AN patient started refeeding.

5. Results

Twins' body characteristics and body composition during the 6 months follow-up are shown in Table 1. After 3 months refeeding, the AN patient's gained 2.2 kg of fat mass and lost 0.7 kg of fat-free mass. After 6 months, she gained 4.6 kg of fat mass and lost 3.3 kg of fat-free mass compared to the baseline. The twin sister showed a progressive increase of both fat-free mass (2 kg) and fat mass (1.5 kg) in 6 months, reflecting the increment of physical activity and energy intake. REE measured by indirect calorimetry (mREE) and predicted by Harris-Benedict (pREE) are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Body characteristics and composition measured by bioelectrical impedance analysis.

Follow-up, months	AN patient			Twin sister		
	0	3	6	0	3	6
Body weight, kg	39.2	40.7	40.2	52.2	53.3	55.7
BMI, kg/m ²	15.4	15.7	15.5	19.4	19.8	20.7
Fat mass, kg	2.6	4.8	7.2	12.2	12.5	13.7
Fat-free mass, kg	36.6	35.9	33	40	40.8	42

Table 2. Energy expenditure measurements.

Follow-up, months	AN patient			Twin sister		
	0	3	6	0	3	6
pREE (kcal/d)	1209	1216	1197	1329	1334	1349
mREE (kcal/d)	927	949	875	1110	1141	1180
mREE/kg (kcal/kg/d)	23.6	23.3	21.8	21.3	21.4	21.2
mREE/Fat-free mass (kcal/kg/d)	25.3	26.4	26.5	27.8	28.8	28.1
Respiratory quotient	0.86	0.80	0.76	0.74	0.74	0.74

The AN patient's mREE increased of 22 Kcal/d after 3 months refeeding compared to the baseline, but decreased of 74 Kcal/d after 6 months, as consequence of fat-free mass loss. As expected, her mREE was lower than predicted by Harris-Benedict formula (76%, mean difference 290 ± 28 Kcal/d) and to her twin sister's (mean diff 227 ± 68 Kcal/d). Interestingly, her twin sister's mREE was lower than predicted (85%, mean diff 198 ± 37 Kcal/d) and despite the gain of fat-free mass during the 6 months, it did not differ much compared to the baseline.

6. Discussion

Similarly to previous investigations [5, 6], our case showed that the AN patient's mREE was lower than predicted. After 3 months refeeding, she gained 2.2 kg of fat mass, but no changes in fat-free mass were observed, resulting in unmodified mREE. On the contrary, the loss of fat-free mass after 6 months refeeding led to a decrease in mREE. Despite the refeeding program, the patient showed no weight gain, probably due to the hyperactivity that we were not able to control. Physical activity during the course of AN has been reported an important modulator of body composition restoration. Available data suggest that maintained hyperactivity is an indicator of poor outcome and can impair weight gain, while programmed and personalized physical activity can be beneficial for the restoration of body composition [7, 8].

Different studies reported a similar respiratory quotient in AN patients and healthy controls, however we measured a higher respiratory quotient in the patient during the first months. This may be explained as a consequence of the refeeding, which implies replenishment of glycogen stores and a reduction in fat catabolism [9, 10].

A REE similar to predicted and to healthy controls was described in recovered AN, mainly due to weight and fat-free mass restore [11]. Surprisingly, our case evidenced that mREE in the twin sister was 85% predicted. A possible explanation could be a still active suppression of energy expenditure in response to the past physiologic adaptation to energy restriction, or the role of other factors than fat-free mass in the determination of her REE. Among the factors known to modify the REE, heredity may explain the low REE we measured. The influence of genetic factors on resting metabolic rate has been studied in obese twins' pairs and a significant level of resemblance in energy expenditure was reported in individuals genetically related by descent [12, 13]. This case report is unique so far as, up to now, REE in anorexic twins' sisters has been unexplored. Contrary to other studies, it outlines a lower energy expenditure in the former AN subject rather than similar to predicted, implying the effect of a down-regulating undetermined factor.

7. Conclusion

This case highlights the negative impact of hyperactivity on body weight control during the treatment of AN. A personalized physical activity program, combined to refeeding, should be considered to promote the restoration of body composition in AN patients. This case also calls the attention to the association between fat-free mass and REE in former AN patients. The typical low mREE

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was assessed, implies the role of other factors than fat-free mass in determining energy expenditure, and underlines the importance of measuring it to accurately define the individual caloric requirements.

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