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Sex-Specific Influences of Vasopressin on Human Social Communication

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Arginine vasopressin (AVP) and related peptides affect social behaviors in numerous species, but AVP influences on human social functions have not yet been established. Here we describe how intranasal AVP administration differentially affects social communication in men and women, and we propose a mechanism through which it may exert those influences. In men AVP stimulates agonistic facial motor patterns in response to the faces of unfamiliar men and decreases perceptions of the friendliness of those faces. In contrast, in women AVP stimulates affiliative facial motor patterns in response to the faces of unfamiliar women and increases perceptions of the friendliness of those faces. AVP also affected autonomic responsiveness to threatening faces and increased anxiety, which may underlie both communication patterns by promoting different social strategies in stressful contexts in men and women.