Abstract

An Animal Model to Investigate Postprandial Metabolism †

Larissa Rodrigues 1,*†, Tushar More 2, Carlos Mario Donado-Pestana 1, Amanda Domingos Vasconcelos 1, Vinicius Bonfieti Mantovam 1, Karsten Hiller 2 and Jarlei Fiamoncini 1

1 Department of Food Science and Experimental Nutrition, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of São Paulo, São Paulo 05508-000, Brazil; donadopesta@usp.br (C.M.D.-P.); amandavasconcelos@usp.br (A.D.V.); viniciusbmantovam@usp.br (V.B.M.); jarlei@usp.br (J.F.)

2 Department of Bioinformatics and Biochemistry, Braunschweig Integrated Center of Systems Biology, Technische Universität Braunschweig, 38106 Braunschweig, Germany; t.more@tu-braunschweig.de (T.M.); karsten.hiller@tu-braunschweig.de (K.H.)

* Correspondence: larissarodrigues@usp.br

Abstract: Background and Objectives: Bile acids (BA) are recognized as metabolic integrators that participate in the regulation of energy metabolism and inflammation. Their concentration in the plasma increases several-fold after a meal. The postprandial period is characterized by physiological changes to accommodate the alterations in nutrient availability and a systemic inflammatory response. An animal model would be an important tool to investigate postprandial metabolism, but there is no fully characterized model, and it is uncertain whether human responses to a meal can be reproduced in animals. This study aimed to characterize an animal model for investigating postprandial metabolism and inflammation, with a focus on the role of BA in the modulation of postprandial inflammation.

Methods: Changes in plasma BA levels and hepatic cytokine concentrations were investigated in male Sprague-Dawley rats (n = 50) at different time points after the ingestion of a high-fat meal (fasting, 60, 120, 180, and 300 min). Results: Plasma BA levels were quantified using liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS), and hepatic inflammatory marker content was assessed using Western blotting. As a result, we observed that unlike humans, rats showed a predominance of unconjugated BA (~70%) both during fasting and throughout the postprandial period in the plasma, with cholic acid being the most abundant species (~36%). On the other hand, rats exhibited a postprandial inflammatory response with a temporal resolution like that observed in humans. In the liver, two hours after meal ingestion, the content of Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR-4) was 30% higher than in the fasting state (p = 0.0071). Discussion: TLR-4 is a receptor that interacts with intracellular adaptors to activate tumor necrosis factor α (TNF-α), which also increased in the liver three hours after meal ingestion (p = 0.0208). Increased hepatic mRNA expression of interleukin 6 (IL-6) and interleukin 1β (IL-1β) was also observed at 60 min. Preliminary analysis demonstrated that rats exhibit postprandial inflammation in the liver and may constitute a valid experimental model to investigate postprandial alterations also observed in clinical trials.

Keywords: bile acids; post-prandial; energy metabolism; meta-inflammation; metabolomics

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, L.R. and J.F.; methodology, J.F. and K.H.; formal analysis, L.R., C.M.D.-P. and T.M.; investigation, L.R., C.M.D.-P., A.D.V. and V.B.M.; resources, J.F. and K.H.; writing—original draft preparation, L.R.; writing—review and editing, L.R. and J.F.; supervision, J.F. and K.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo—FAPESP (CEPID FoRC 13/07914-8, LR 21/09237-0, CMDP 20/16542-0, ADV 22/08109-0, VBM 23/02522-6, and JF 22/02941-6).
Institutional Review Board Statement: The animal study protocol was carried out in strict compliance with Brazilian legislation and approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences of the University of São Paulo (FCF/USP/CEUA/629).

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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