LIVER GLUCOSE, GLYCOGEN AND LIPID SYNTHESIS
IN FED AND 24-HOUR FASTED RATS SOON AFTER A PULSE
OF [3-14C]PYRUVATE THROUGH THE PORTAL VEIN

M. SOLEY, R. CHIERI and E. HERRERA
Catedra de Fisiologia General, Facultad de Biologia, Universidad de Barcelona and
Departamento de Investigacion, Centro "Ramón y Cajal", Ctra. de Colmenar km 9, Madrid 34, Spain

(Received 23 April 1982)

Abstract—1. A pulse of [3-14C]pyruvate was given to rats through the portal vein and blood was
collected at brief intervals from the inferior cava vein at the level of the suprahepatic veins.
2. In 24 hr fasted rats, the appearance of [14C]glucose in blood and blood glucose specific radio-
activity were higher than in fed animals from the first minute after delivery of the tracer. At this time
total radioactivity did not differ between the two groups.
3. After 5 and 20 min, liver radioactivity present in glycogen and glyceride glycerol was enhanced
while in fatty acids it was reduced in fasted as compared with fed animals.
4. It is proposed that, in the fasted state, both glycogen and glyceride glycerol synthesis are predomi-
nantly gluconeogenic processes.

INTRODUCTION

Although liver glycogen is generally considered the major product in the disposal of increased blood glu-
cose concentrations (Stalmans, 1976), loading the per-
fused liver with high amounts of glucose yields very
little formation of glycogen from glucose, whereas the
addition of gluconeogenic substrates results in sub-
stantial glycogen synthesis (Hems et al., 1972; Whit-
ton & Hems, 1977). After the "in vivo" injection of
[3-14C]pyruvate in the fasted rat, we found the appear-
ance of [14C]glycogen in liver greatly enhanced (Herrera et al., 1969). More recently, Katz
et al. (1979) reported that the contribution of glu-
coneogenic precursors to liver glycogen synthesis
becomes quantitatively important when liver glycogen
is depleted. The problem of liver glycogen synthesis
remains unclear as no correlation has been found be-
tween liver glycogen enzymes and actual glycogen
concentrations and/or synthesis (Den Otter, 1974;
Remesar & Alemany, 1980; Shikama et al., 1980).
Determi-
nation of the role of gluconeogenic precursors in
glycogen and glucose synthesis is complicated by the
substrate recycling which varies with the animals'
dietary status (Freidmann et al., 1971; Okajima
et al., 1981). In the present study, the conversion of
[3-14C]pyruvate into glucose and glycogen in the
liver of fed and 24 hr fasted rats was investigated with a
technique previously used for assessing the role of the liver in the hypoglycemic effects of insulin (Chieri
et al., 1966). This technique allows sampling directly
from the liver at very short intervals after administra-
tion of the tracer, avoiding artefacts produced by its
recycling. In view of the recent interest in the role of
glycerol-3-phosphate availability in glycereid glycerol
synthesis in the liver of fasted animals (Debeer et al.,
1981), our study was extended to determine the con-
version of the administered [3-14C]pyruvate into liver
fatty acids and glyceride glycerol.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Male Wistar rats weighing 200 ± 5 g were studied when
fed a commercial purina chow diet "ad libitum" or after a
24 hr fast. Animals were anesthetized by an i.v. injection
of sodium pentobarbital (60 mg/kg b.w.) and a pulse of 1 μCi
of [3-14C]pyruvate (from the Radiochemical Center, Amer-
sham: specific activity 15.8 mCi/mmol) containing
100 μmol of sodium pyruvate/100 g b.w., was given through
the portal vein. Blood aliquots were collected at the level of the
suprakepatic veins at different intervals thereafter. The surgical
procedure used was similar to that previously de-
scribed by Chieri et al. (1966) for other purposes and may
be summarized as follows: After laparotomy, a cannula
(PE-10 Intramedic, Clay Adams, NJ) is introduced through
the ileocholic vein up to the level of the portal vein. After
the suture of the abdominal wall, another cannula is intro-
duced (PE-50, Intramedic, Clay Adams, NJ) through the
right jugular vein passing by the superior cava vein up to the
level of the suprakepatic veins. Once cannulation is
completed, a saline-albumin solution (0.5 g bovine
albumin/1 of 0.9% NaCl) is perfused through the cannula in
the portal vein, at the rate of 5 ml/hr for 5 min, after which
the pulse of [3-14C]pyruvate is given, followed by per-
fusion with saline-albumin solution until the end of the
experiment. Blood aliquots of about 0.2 ml are collected
into heparinized syringes from the cannula placed at the
level of the suprakepatic veins, at 1, 5, 10 and 20 min
after the tracer. At the last blood collection, a piece of liver
is placed into liquid N2. In other animals, blood was col-
clected for only the first 5 min when the experiment was
ended by placing a piece of liver into liquid N2. The cor-
rect disposition of the cannulas was always checked by
animal autopsy and values were not used unless an ade-
quate cannula location was observed. Blood aliquots were
deproteinized (Somogyi, 1945) and supernatants were used
to measure glucose (Huggett & Nixon, 1957) and placed in
Duolite A-561 (generously supplied by Diamond Shamrock, CA)– Dowex 1×2–400 (Sigma, St Louis, MO) (Herrera et al, 1969) that were eluted with double distilled water until 3 ml of eluate was produced. Aliquots of the eluates were used to determine the radioactivity in [14C]glucose and, as shown also in Table 1, this parameter augmented with time after tracer administration in both groups of animals, although it was significantly greater in fasted than in fed rats from the 1st min on. Blood glucose concentration did not change in either group throughout the experiment (Table 1) and it was lower in the fasted than in the fed animals. Consequently, blood glucose-specific activity was much greater in the fasted than in the fed animals from the 1st until the 20th min after tracer administration (Table 1). To determine the incorporation of radioactivity into liver glycogen and lipids, some animals in each group were sacrificed at 5 and 20 min. As seen in Table 2, the liver content of [14C]glycogen changed very little after tracer administration and at the two times studied, it was significantly higher in the fasted than in the fed animals. Liver glycogen concentration was much lower in fasted than in fed animals (Table 2) and in both groups it decreased progressively. Liver glycogen-specific activity was much greater in fasted than in fed animals (Table 2) and it rose in the former group after tracer administration. As shown in Table 3, the appearance of radioactivity in total lipids was slightly but not significantly higher in fasted than in fed animals, and in both groups, values at the 20 min sample were higher than at 5 min. The distribution of this radioactivity among the lipidic fractions differed markedly between the two groups. In the fasted animals, radioactivity in the fatty acids was much lower than in the fed subjects while radioactivity in the glycere glycerol fraction was much greater in the fasted rat (Table 3). These relations did not differ between the groups when studied at 5 or 20 min after the [14C]pyruvate pulse although the amount of label found in liver lipids augmented with time in both groups.

**RESULTS**

Fed and 24 hr fasted rats were given a pulse of [3-14C]pyruvate through the portal vein and blood was subsequently collected from the inferior cava vein at the level of the suprahepatic veins at different times. As shown in Table 1, total blood radioactivity did not differ between either group of animals at the 1 min time, while it decreased more slowly in fasted than in fed animals, the difference becoming significant from the 2nd min on. A certain proportion of this circulating radioactivity corresponded to [14C]glucose and, as shown also in Table 1, this parameter augmented with time after tracer administration in both groups of animals, although it was significantly greater in fasted than in fed rats from the 1st min on. Blood glucose concentration did not change in either group throughout the experiment (Table 1) and it was lower in the fasted than in the fed animals. Consequently, blood glucose-specific activity was much greater in the fasted than in the fed animals from the 1st until the 20th min after tracer administration (Table 1). To determine the incorporation of radioactivity into liver glycogen and lipids, some animals in each group were sacrificed at 5 and 20 min. As seen in Table 2, the liver content of [14C]glycogen changed very little after tracer administration and at the two times studied, it was significantly higher in the fasted than in the fed animals. Liver glycogen concentration was much lower in fasted than in fed animals (Table 2) and in both groups it decreased progressively. Liver glycogen-specific activity was much greater in fasted than in fed animals (Table 2) and it rose in the former group after tracer administration. As shown in Table 3, the appearance of radioactivity in total lipids was slightly but not significantly higher in fasted than in fed animals, and in both groups, values at the 20 min sample were higher than at 5 min. The distribution of this radioactivity among the lipidic fractions differed markedly between the two groups. In the fasted animals, radioactivity in the fatty acids was much lower than in the fed subjects while radioactivity in the glycere glycerol fraction was much greater in the fasted rat (Table 3). These relations did not differ between the groups when studied at 5 or 20 min after the [14C]pyruvate pulse although the amount of label found in liver lipids augmented with time in both groups.

**DISCUSSION**

![Image of Table 1](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes after [3-14C]pyruvate:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total blood radioactivity (dpm/ml)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed</td>
<td>40,640 ± 2549</td>
<td>26,103 ± 902</td>
<td>16,180 ± 619</td>
<td>10,927 ± 468</td>
<td>8411 ± 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>42,933 ± 2323</td>
<td>32,390 ± 857</td>
<td>24,330 ± 779</td>
<td>20,064 ± 497</td>
<td>18,456 ± 689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[14C]Glucose in blood (dpm/ml)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed</td>
<td>585 ± 73</td>
<td>1042 ± 113</td>
<td>1018 ± 140</td>
<td>1154 ± 235</td>
<td>1378 ± 164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>3067 ± 332</td>
<td>4580 ± 380</td>
<td>5350 ± 464</td>
<td>4959 ± 655</td>
<td>5134 ± 531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blood glucose (mg/dl)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed</td>
<td>119 ± 4</td>
<td>106 ± 8</td>
<td>120 ± 11</td>
<td>116 ± 8</td>
<td>116 ± 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>71 ± 4</td>
<td>79 ± 4</td>
<td>74 ± 4</td>
<td>74 ± 6</td>
<td>75 ± 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blood glucose specific radioactivity (dpm/mg)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed</td>
<td>501 ± 84</td>
<td>1162 ± 116</td>
<td>911 ± 149</td>
<td>924 ± 218</td>
<td>991 ± 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>4224 ± 531</td>
<td>5407 ± 442</td>
<td>7718 ± 894</td>
<td>6925 ± 1020</td>
<td>6909 ± 620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Blood samples were collected from the inferior cava vein at the level of the suprahepatic veins, at different times after trace administration. Means ± SEM of 6-14 rats/group. *P* values correspond to the comparison between fed and fasted animals (NS = not significant, *P* > 0.05).
the formation of 14C-lipids in liver after a pulse of [3-14C]pyruvate through the portal vein.

Table 3. Effect of 24 hr fast in the rat on liver glycogen parameters after a pulse of [3-14C]pyruvate through the portal vein

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes after [3-14C]pyruvate</th>
<th>Glycogen conc. (dpm/mg)</th>
<th>Glycogen specific radioactivity (dpm/mg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed</td>
<td>624 ± 79</td>
<td>488 ± 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>1784 ± 257</td>
<td>2252 ± 439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>P</em></td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Animals were sacrificed at 5 or 20 min after tracer administration and a piece of liver was immediately placed into liquid N2 for glycogen purification. Means ± SEM of 5-10 rats/group. *P* corresponds to the comparison between fed and fasted animals.

mination of production of [14C]glucose by the liver within minutes of tracer administration. This procedure minimizes the problem of gluconeogenetic substrate recycling which is known to be significant in other experimental conditions (Freidmann et al., 1971; Freminet et al., 1976; Okajima et al., 1981) and is affected by the dietary status of animals (Friedmann et al., 1971; Freminet et al., 1976). An augmented production of [14C]glucose by the liver was found in fasted compared with fed animals 1 min after tracer delivery. At this time, blood [14C]glucose corresponded to a minor percentage (1.4–7.1%) of total blood radioactivity and this latter parameter did not differ between fed and fasted animals. Thus sampling soon after tracer delivery avoids the changes which may be produced by differences in peripheral utilization of the newly formed glucose in the two experimental groups. It also allows measurement of the [14C]glucose formed when the availability of the labelled substrate does not differ between groups. These two factors (peripheral utilization of glucose and substrate availability) are known to be affected by dietary status (Blackshear et al., 1974; Freminet et al., 1976) and changes in circulating labelled glucose at later periods may indeed be influenced by them. Present results showing an intense activation of liver gluconeogenesis after 24 hr of fasting confirm other findings obtained with different methodologies (Herrera et al., 1969; Schimmel & Knobil, 1970; McGarry et al., 1973) but the greater sensitivity obtained with the technique used here offers the possibility of studying very rapid actions of effectors on this pathway.

Changes in the appearance of 14C in liver glycogen and in liver glycogen-specific activity indicate that after 24 hr of food deprivation, there is increased conversion of gluconeogenetic substrates into liver glycogen. The reduced concentration of liver glycogen after fasting indicates an augmented net degradation but release into circulation of newly synthesized glucose in the fasted liver may require the previous synthesis of glycogen from gluconeogenic substrates and its subsequent breakdown, resulting in the formation of free glucose. This “futile” cycle between glycogen synthesis and glucose formation would facilitate hepatic glycogen deposition on re-feeding after starvation by continued gluconeogenesis and reduced glycogen breakdown, as already proposed (Hems et al., 1972). Our results also agree with those of Katz et al. (1979) who have emphasized the important role of glycogen synthesis from gluconeogenic precursors when liver glycogen is depleted, suggesting that in the fasted state, glycogen synthesis is predominantly a gluconeogenic process.

The conversion of [14C]pyruvate into fatty acids appeared greatly reduced in the liver of fasted rats, in agreement with previous reports (Aranda & Herrera, 1974; Llobera et al., 1979). In the fed animals, a similar amount of pyruvate was canalized to both lipogenesis and glycride glycerol formation. In the fasted rats, however, the reduction in liver lipogenesis was counteracted by a marked increase in the formation of [14C]glyceride glycerol, which was observed already at 5 min after tracer administration, suggesting that the esterification of fatty acids reaching the liver from peripheral fat depot mobilization is maintained in the fasted animal by the glycrol-3-phosphate formed from gluconeogenic precursors. It is known that for a given load of fatty acids, “in vitro” preparations of liver from fed rats esterify a greater

Table 3. Effect of 24 hr fast in the rat on the formation of 14C-lipids in liver after a pulse of [3-14C]pyruvate through the portal vein

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes after [3-14C]pyruvate</th>
<th>Total lipids</th>
<th>Fatty acids</th>
<th>Glyceride glycerol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed</td>
<td>2659 ± 585</td>
<td>3845 ± 415</td>
<td>1648 ± 481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasted</td>
<td>3658 ± 376</td>
<td>5390 ± 799</td>
<td>198 ± 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>P</em></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Animals were sacrificed at 5 or 20 mm after tracer administration and a piece of liver was immediately placed into liquid N2 for lipids extraction and fractionation. Means ± SEM of 5-10 rats/group. *P* corresponds to the comparison between fed and fasted animals. Values are expressed as dpm/g. (NS = not significant, *P* > 0.05).
proportion of the incoming fatty acids than do similar preparations from starved rats. In the latter, fatty acid oxidation increases in relation with esterification (Mayes & Felts, 1967; McGarry & Foster, 1971; Ontko, 1972). It has also recently been reported that the rate of esterification in hepatocytes from starved rats is limited by their deficiency of glycerol-3-phosphate (Debeer et al., 1981). In the “in vitro” situation, starvation is associated with an enhancement in fat deposit mobilization which produces an increase in circulating free fatty acids concentration (Schimmel & Knobil, 1970; Llobera et al., 1978; Palou et al., 1981) and their subsequently increased delivery to the liver. This action alone is not sufficient to provoke increased hepatic ketogenesis (McGarry et al., 1973) and there is actually a considerable time lag between the increase in circulating free fatty acids and ketone body levels in the starved rat (McGarry et al., 1973; Llobera et al., 1978; Palou et al., 1981). Thus, since the ability of the liver to store fatty acids in the free form is very limited (Göransson & Olivecroma, 1964; Kohout et al., 1971), they are forced to be temporally esterified even in the fasted state (Palmer et al., 1978). In this condition, the limited availability of glycerol in the liver (Berdanier et al., 1979) as compared to the needs of glycerol-3-phosphate for esterification (Debeer et al., 1981) necessitates the use of gluconeogenic precursors for glyceride glycerol formation. The increased cytosolic redox state in the liver of the starved animal (Williamson et al., 1967 Berdanier et al., 1979) facilitates this diversion of dihydroxyacetone phosphate to glycerol-3-phosphate as it does for the formation of glyceraldehyde phosphate from 1,3-diphosphoglycerate, producing a parallel enhancement of liver glycerolgenesis and gluconeogenesis from the same substrate.

Acknowledgements This study was supported in part by a grant from the Comisión Asesora de Investigación Científica y Técnica, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Spain. The authors wish to thank Caroline S. Delgado for her editorial help.

REFERENCES

Liver gluconeogenesis in fasting rat


