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**THE USE OF BREATH HYDROGEN TESTING TO  
EVALUATE CARBOHYDRATE  
MALABSORPTION IN DOGS**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Veterinary Science in Small Animal Medicine at  
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## Abstract

The use of the breath hydrogen test in this thesis has focussed primarily on the study of carbohydrate assimilation in healthy dogs and in dogs with gastrointestinal disease. The gastrointestinal handling of dietary carbohydrates and the rationale, applications, and limitations of the breath hydrogen test have been reviewed. Studies were undertaken to investigate the effect of food particle size on carbohydrate digestion and the effect of dehydration on breath hydrogen concentrations in healthy dogs. In addition, breath hydrogen testing was used to assess the assimilation of four commonly used commercial carbohydrate sources in dogs with gastrointestinal disease. In each study, expired breath samples were collected at regular intervals after the ingestion of a carbohydrate test meal. The excretion of hydrogen in the breath was compared between groups, mainly by analysis of the areas under the breath hydrogen concentration versus time curves.

The reduction of food particle size was found to cause starch granule disruption and significantly decreased the amount of malassimilated rice. The assimilation of corn, however, did not appear to be altered by reducing the food particle size. Instead, an earlier rise of breath hydrogen concentrations occurred, indicating more rapid orocolic transit and/or fermentability of the smaller corn particles.

Five percent dehydration, induced by food and water deprivation, was found to significantly elevate breath hydrogen concentrations and was associated with a significantly greater number of flatus-contaminated breath samples. This increased breath hydrogen excretion associated with increased flatulence in dehydrated dogs was attributed to a greater "net" production of hydrogen within the gastrointestinal tract.

Finally, breath hydrogen concentrations were not found to vary significantly between four different extrusion cooked carbohydrate sources (wheat, potato, corn, rice). However, it could not be concluded that these carbohydrates were assimilated to a similar extent as *in vitro* fermentation results revealed marked differences in the amount of hydrogen produced per gram of carbohydrate fermented at different fermentation times. Individual dogs with gastrointestinal disease appeared to differ in their ability to assimilate the four different carbohydrate sources. In addition, dogs with exocrine pancreatic insufficiency were found to malabsorb significantly more carbohydrate than the dogs with mild inflammatory bowel disease.

In conclusion, food processing to reduce carbohydrate particle size appears to increase the assimilation of rice. Methods to reduce the particle size of rice should be considered in the formulation of veterinary therapeutic diets for the management of diarrhoea. Mild dehydration

appears to increase breath hydrogen excretion. This suggests that breath hydrogen tests should not be performed on animals that are suboptimally hydrated until their hydration deficits have been restored. The marked individual variation of carbohydrate assimilation noted in dogs with gastrointestinal disease, suggests that clinicians should consider altering the carbohydrate source offered to dogs with intractable malassimilation, with the aim of finding the carbohydrate best tolerated. Finally, direct comparison of breath hydrogen concentrations should not be used to compare the digestibility of different complex carbohydrates unless an accurate means is available of comparing the amount of hydrogen produced per gram of substrate fermented *in vivo*.

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## Table of Contents

|                                                             |                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abstract                                                    | ii                                                                                                                           |
| Acknowledgments                                             | iv                                                                                                                           |
| Table of Contents                                           | v                                                                                                                            |
| List of Tables                                              | vii                                                                                                                          |
| List of Figures                                             | viii                                                                                                                         |
| <br>Chapter 1.                                              | <br>A Review of Gastrointestinal Handling of Dietary Carbohydrates . . . . . 1-27                                            |
| -Introduction                                               | 1                                                                                                                            |
| -Carbohydrates in the Diet                                  | 2                                                                                                                            |
| -Carbohydrates in the Small Bowel: Digestion and Absorption | 5                                                                                                                            |
| -Carbohydrates in the Large Bowel: Fermentation             | 13                                                                                                                           |
| -Carbohydrate Intolerance                                   | 21                                                                                                                           |
| -References                                                 | 23                                                                                                                           |
| <br>Chapter 2.                                              | <br>A Review of the Breath Hydrogen Test . . . . . 28-75                                                                     |
| -Introduction                                               | 28                                                                                                                           |
| -Breath Hydrogen as a Measure of Intestinal Gas Formation   | 28                                                                                                                           |
| -Applications of the Breath Hydrogen Test                   | 36                                                                                                                           |
| -Variables and Limitations of Breath Hydrogen Measurements  | 54                                                                                                                           |
| -References                                                 | 65                                                                                                                           |
| <br>Chapter 3.                                              | <br>Effect of Food Particle Size on Carbohydrate Assimilation Assessed by<br>Breath Hydrogen Testing in Dogs . . . . . 76-92 |
| -Introduction                                               | 76                                                                                                                           |
| -Materials and methods                                      | 78                                                                                                                           |
| -Results                                                    | 82                                                                                                                           |
| -Discussion                                                 | 88                                                                                                                           |
| -References                                                 | 90                                                                                                                           |

|            |                                                                                                              |         |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Chapter 4. | Effect of 5% Dehydration on Breath Hydrogen Concentrations in Dogs                                           | 93-104  |
|            | -Introduction                                                                                                | 93      |
|            | -Materials and methods                                                                                       | 94      |
|            | -Results                                                                                                     | 97      |
|            | -Discussion                                                                                                  | 100     |
|            | -References                                                                                                  | 102     |
| Chapter 5. | A Comparison of Wheat, Potato, Corn and Rice Assimilation in Dogs with Diarrhoea using Breath Hydrogen Tests | 105-116 |
|            | -Introduction                                                                                                | 105     |
|            | -Materials and methods                                                                                       | 106     |
|            | -Results                                                                                                     | 109     |
|            | -Discussion                                                                                                  | 112     |
|            | -References                                                                                                  | 115     |
| Chapter 6. | Conclusions                                                                                                  | 117-119 |

## List of Tables

|           |                                                                                                                         |     |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Table 1.1 | Main food carbohydrates .....                                                                                           | 5   |
| Table 1.2 | Major intestinal brush border carbohydrases in mammals .....                                                            | 9   |
| Table 2.1 | Examples of the methodology and criteria used for investigating SIBO by<br>breath H <sub>2</sub> analysis .....         | 41  |
| Table 2.2 | Examples of the methodology and criteria used for estimating OCTT by<br>breath H <sub>2</sub> analysis .....            | 46  |
| Table 3.1 | Protocol used to obtain expired breath samples by the anaesthetic face<br>mask technique .....                          | 81  |
| Table 3.2 | Mean $\pm$ SD breath H <sub>2</sub> data of 10 dogs after the ingestion of a whole rice or<br>blended rice meal .....   | 82  |
| Table 3.3 | Mean $\pm$ SD breath H <sub>2</sub> data of 10 dogs after the ingestion of a chopped corn<br>or blended corn meal ..... | 85  |
| Table 4.1 | Clinical and laboratory parameters of dehydrated and non-dehydrated<br>dogs .....                                       | 98  |
| Table 5.1 | Nutritional analysis of the wheat, potato, corn and rice flours .....                                                   | 107 |
| Table 5.2 | Composition of medium used to culture faecal microflora .....                                                           | 108 |
| Table 5.3 | Mean <i>in vitro</i> H <sub>2</sub> and CH <sub>4</sub> production of wheat, potato, corn and rice<br>substrates .....  | 111 |

## List of Figures

|            |                                                                                                                                                 |     |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Figure 1.1 | An example of the molecular structure and $\alpha$ 1,6 branching point of the amylopectin chain                                                 | 4   |
| Figure 1.2 | Alpha-amylase hydrolysis of amylose and amylopectin chains                                                                                      | 7   |
| Figure 1.3 | Active transport of glucose (or galactose) across the brush border membrane by the $\text{Na}^+$ -glucose cotransporter                         | 12  |
| Figure 1.4 | Overview of carbohydrate degradation and fermentation in the large bowel                                                                        | 16  |
| Figure 3.1 | The collection of expired breath by the face mask technique                                                                                     | 80  |
| Figure 3.2 | Mean $\pm$ SEM breath $\text{H}_2$ concentrations of 10 dogs after the ingestion of a whole rice or blended rice meal                           | 83  |
| Figure 3.3 | Photomicrographs of cooked rice starch from two different rice meals                                                                            | 84  |
| Figure 3.4 | Mean $\pm$ SEM breath $\text{H}_2$ concentrations of 10 dogs after the ingestion of a chopped corn or blended corn meal                         | 86  |
| Figure 3.5 | Photomicrographs of cooked corn starch from two different corn meals                                                                            | 87  |
| Figure 4.1 | Mean $\pm$ SEM breath $\text{H}_2$ concentrations of 10 dehydrated and non-dehydrated dogs after the ingestion of a wheat-containing test meal  | 99  |
| Figure 4.2 | AUC of 10 dogs tested when dehydrated and non-dehydrated over 18 hours after the ingestion of a wheat-containing test meal                      | 99  |
| Figure 5.1 | Mean $\pm$ SEM breath $\text{H}_2$ concentrations of 12 dogs after the ingestion of wheat, potato, corn and rice meals                          | 110 |
| Figure 5.2 | Mean $\pm$ SEM breath $\text{H}_2$ concentrations of the dogs with exocrine pancreatic insufficiency (EPI) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) | 113 |
| Figure 5.3 | AUC data of 12 dogs over 18 hours after the ingestion of each of the four different carbohydrate                                                | 113 |