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**The effect of dietary fat, antioxidants, and
alcohol on serum lipoprotein concentrations
and aortic fatty streak formation in the
C57BL/6 mouse model of atherosclerosis.**

A thesis presented
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Massey University

John Stephen Munday

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“You scientists *think* too much,” blurted Miss Pefko. She laughed idiotically. Dr Breed's friendliness had blown every fuse in her mental system.

A winded, defeated-looking woman in filthy coveralls trudged beside us, hearing what Miss Pefko said. She turned to examine Dr. Breed, looking at him with helpless reproach. She hated people who thought too much. The fat woman's expression implied that she would go crazy on the spot if anybody did any more thinking.

“I think you will find,” said Dr. Breed, “that everybody does about the same amount of thinking. Scientists simply think about things one way, and other people think about things in others.”

“Ech,” gurgled Miss Pefko emptily. “I take dictation from Dr. Horvath and it's just like a foreign language. When I used to come home from school Mother used to ask me what happened that day, and I'd tell her. Now I come home from work and she asks me the same question, and all I can say is-” Miss Pefko shook her head and let her crimson lips flap slackly-

“I dunno, I dunno, I dunno.”

“If there's something you don't understand,” urged Dr. Breed, “ask Dr. Horvath to explain it.”

He turned to me. “Dr. Hoenikker used to say that any scientist who couldn't explain to an eight-year-old what he was doing was a charlatan.”

“Then I'm dumber than an eight-year-old,” Miss Pefko mourned. “I don't even know what a charlatan is.”

from 'Cat's Cradle' by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Victor Gollancz Ltd. London. 1963

Abstract

In this research programme the effect of dietary fat, alcohol, and antioxidants on the serum lipoprotein profile and the development of atherosclerosis was studied in a series of experiments, primarily using the C57BL/6 mouse model of atherosclerosis. These mice, when fed a special diet, develop fatty streaks (thought to be the earliest lesion of atherosclerosis) in the intima of the aortic sinus within 15 weeks. Another mouse model of early atherogenesis, the human apoB-transgenic mouse model, was also used but was not found to possess any clear advantages over the non-transgenic C57BL/6 model. Pilot *in vitro* studies using isolated human low density lipoprotein (LDL) and macrophage cell cultures were also performed.

The effects of different dietary fats on serum lipoprotein concentrations are generally well known, however, their role in atherogenesis remains controversial. To provide further information on this, atherogenic diets containing different proportions of saturated and unsaturated fats supplied from a variety of commercial fats/oils were fed to C57BL/6 mice for 15 weeks. In contrast to the results of human studies, a high proportion of saturated fatty acids in the diet of these mice increased the ratio of serum high density lipoprotein (HDL) to total cholesterol. Although diets high in saturated fat also reduced atherogenesis in the mouse model, the literature suggests that dietary fats produce dissimilar changes in the lipoprotein profile of humans. Therefore, whether or not saturated fatty acids will have similar effects in humans remains unknown. Another group of dietary fats which have been suggested to reduce atherogenesis are the conjugated linoleic acids. However, despite producing a less atherogenic lipoprotein profile, the inclusion of conjugated linoleic acids in the experimental diet promoted fatty streak formation in C57BL/6 mice.

Epidemiological evidence suggests that dietary antioxidants may reduce atherogenesis. To investigate this experimentally, vitamin E and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) were examined using the C57BL/6 mouse model. Compared to controls, vitamin E lowered serum total cholesterol concentration but did not reduce fatty streak formation, while BHT lowered the ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol and increased fatty streak formation. Because both these antioxidants were found to affect key enzymes involving lipid metabolism, it is impossible to use data from these studies to determine whether or not their

antioxidant properties influenced atherosclerosis.

The ability of dietary antioxidants to protect LDL particles from oxidation was investigated. Human subjects were given 6g of raw garlic, 2.4g of aged garlic extract, or 0.8g vitamin E each day for 7 days. Supplementation with vitamin E greatly increased the resistance of the isolated LDL to oxidation. Less, but still significant, protection was provided by aged garlic extract, but raw garlic was without effect.

There are reports in the literature that moderate consumption of alcohol by human subjects increases serum HDL cholesterol concentration and decreases atherosclerosis risk. To investigate the effect of alcohol in the mouse model, C57BL/6 mice were given water containing 3.1% alcohol in the form of either red or white wine. In contrast to humans, dietary alcohol lowered the proportion of serum cholesterol contained in the HDL fraction and promoted fatty streak formation in the C57BL/6 mouse model. While it is likely that some of the increased atherogenesis was attributable to lowered serum HDL cholesterol concentrations, data from this study suggested that dietary alcohol also influenced atherogenesis independently of the serum lipoprotein profile. No differences were observed between mice receiving alcohol from either red or white wine, suggesting that the greater quantity of antioxidants contained in red wine did not influence serum lipoprotein concentration or fatty streak formation in this model.

In conclusion, it is probable that differences in lipid metabolism between humans and C57BL/6 mice resulted in some of the dietary factors altering the serum lipoprotein concentration of mice in a way which would be considered unlikely to occur in humans. Changes in the serum lipoproteins probably then contributed to the seemingly anomalous increases in fatty streak formation that was observed in some experiments. These results illustrate some of the problems involved in investigating a disease which only occurs naturally in humans. Data derived from studies using *animal* and *in vitro* models may be able to provide useful information regarding human atherosclerosis. However, because it is unknown how accurately *animal* and *in vitro* models of atherosclerosis represent the human disease, the results of such studies must be interpreted with caution.

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Table of contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of contents	vi
List of figures	xii
List of tables	xv

Chapter 1

Review of the literature	1
1. Lipid metabolism	2
Pre-hepatic lipid metabolism	3
Chylomicrons	3
Hepatic lipid metabolism	4
Triglyceride	4
Cholesterol	4
Post-hepatic lipid metabolism	6
Very low density lipoproteins	6
Intermediate density lipoproteins	7
Low density lipoproteins	7
High density lipoproteins	7
Lipoprotein (a)	8
2. Regulation of serum lipid concentrations	9
Triglyceride	9
Chylomicrons	9
Very low density lipoproteins	9
Cholesterol	10
Low density lipoproteins	10
High density lipoproteins	12
3. Pathogenesis of atherosclerosis	13
The normal artery wall	13
Lipoprotein accumulation and oxidation	13

Formation of foam cells	16
Development of an atheroma	18
Development of a complicated lesion	18
4. Animal models of atherosclerosis	20
Mouse models of atherosclerosis	20
The C57BL/6 mouse model	20
Transgenic/knockout mice	21
Non-murine animal models of atherosclerosis	23
Rabbits	23
Pigs	23
Non-human primates	23
Rats	24
Hamsters	24
Birds	24
5. Risk factors for atherosclerosis	25
LDL cholesterol	25
VLDL, IDL, and chylomicrons	26
HDL cholesterol	26
Lipoprotein (a)	26
Triglyceride	27
Thrombosis and fibrinolysis	27
Hypertension	28
Genotype	28
Diabetes	28
6. Possible modifiers of risk factors for atherosclerosis	28
Dietary fat	28
Saturated fatty acids	29
Monounsaturated fatty acids	31
Polyunsaturated fatty acids	32
Cholesterol	33
Conjugated linoleic acids	33
Antioxidants	34

Vitamin E	35
Carotenoids	36
Vitamin C	38
Selenium	39
Polyphenols	40
Other antioxidants	41
Alcohol	41
Tobacco smoking	44
Obesity	44
Physical exercise	44
Homocystinaemia	44
Infectious agents	45

Chapter 2

Materials and methods	46
Experimental animals	46
Experimental diets	46
Sample collection and processing	47
Histological techniques	48
Statistical analysis	49

Chapter 3

Preliminary studies attempting to improve the palatability of atherogenic diets .	50
1. Variation in the palatability of different cholic acid compounds	50
Materials and methods	51
Results and discussion	51
2. Necessity of including cholic acid in atherogenic diets	52
Materials and methods	52
Results and discussion	52

Chapter 4**An evaluation of the human apoB-transgenic mouse model of atherosclerosis . . 58**

Introduction	58
Materials and methods	58
Experimental animals	58
Experimental design	59
Sample collection and processing	59
Statistical analysis	59
Results	59
Discussion	60

Chapter 5**The effect of dietary fats on fatty streak development in the C57BL/6 mouse****model 66**

Introduction	66
Materials and methods	67
Experimental animals	67
Experimental design	67
Experimental diets	67
Sample collection and processing	68
Statistical analysis	69
Results	69
Discussion	73

Chapter 6**The effect of dietary antioxidants on fatty streak development in the C57BL/6****mouse model 78**

Introduction	78
Materials and methods	79
Experimental animals	79
Experimental design	79
Experimental diets	79

Sample collection and processing	80
Statistical analysis	80
Results	81
Discussion	83

Chapter 7

The effect of dietary alcohol on fatty streak development in the C57BL/6

mouse model	87
Introduction	87
Materials and methods	88
Experimental animals	88
Experimental design	88
Experimental diets	89
Analysis of phenolic content of wine	89
Sample collection and processing	89
Statistical analysis	90
Results	90
Discussion	93

Chapter 8

The effect of dietary conjugated linoleic acids on fatty streak development in

the C57BL/6 mouse model	96
Introduction	96
Materials and methods	97
Experimental animals	97
Experimental design	97
Experimental diets	97
Sample collection and processing	97
Statistical analysis	98
Results	98
Discussion	100

Chapter 9

<i>In vitro</i> investigations	104
1. The effect of daily supplementation with aged garlic extract, raw garlic, and α -tocopherol on low density lipoprotein oxidation	104
Introduction	104
Materials and methods	105
Study design	105
Materials	106
Subjects	106
Lipoprotein analysis	107
LDL oxidation studies	107
Statistical analysis	108
Results	108
Discussion	109
2. Oxidation of LDL by peritoneal macrophage cell cultures	112
Introduction	112
Materials and methods	113
Harvesting peritoneal macrophages	113
LDL isolation	114
Macrophage-mediated oxidation	114
Macrophage LDL uptake studies	114
Results and discussion	115
Oxidation of LDL by macrophages in Ham's F-10 medium	115
Oxidation of LDL by macrophages in MPBS	116
Conclusion	118

Chapter 10

General discussion	120
Appendix	127
References	129

List of figures

Figure 1.1. Clinical sequelae of atherosclerosis	2
Figure 1.2. Lipid oxidation within an LDL particle	15
Figure 1.3. Dietary fats and atherosclerosis	30
Figure 3.1. Mean body weight of mice fed diets containing one of three cholic acid compounds or a cholic acid-free control diet	51
Figure 3.2. Mean body weight of mice fed diets with and without cholic acid	53
Figure 3.3. Photomicrographs of aortic fatty streak lesions in C57BL/6 mice	54
Figure 3.4. Relationship between fatty streak area and serum cholesterol concentration	56
Figure 4.1. Photomicrographs of aortic fatty streak lesions in human apoB-transgenic mice	61
Figure 4.2. Relationship between fatty streak lesion area and the ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol in human apoB-transgenic mice	63
Figure 5.1. Mean body weight of mice fed diets containing different dietary fats	69
Figure 5.2. Relationship between the mean serum HDL concentration and the ratio of saturated to unsaturated fat in the diet	71

Figure 5.3. Relationship between mean fatty streak area and the ratio of saturated to unsaturated fatty acids in the diet	72
Figure 5.4. Relationship between fatty streak area and the ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol in mice receiving different dietary fats	73
Figure 6.1. Relationship between serum total antioxidant status and the ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol	82
Figure 6.2. Relationship between mean fatty streak area and mean ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol in mice receiving dietary antioxidants	83
Figure 7.1. Relationship between fatty streak area and the ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol in mice receiving dietary alcohol	92
Figure 8.1. Relationship between fatty streak area and the ratio of serum HDL to total cholesterol in mice receiving dietary conjugated linoleic acids	100
Figure 9.1. Sample graph showing kinetics of conjugated diene formation	108
Figure 9.2. Effect of dietary supplements on LDL oxidation lag times	110
Figure 9.3. Kinetics of macrophage-mediated LDL oxidation	116
Figure 9.4. Photomicrographs of macrophage cell cultures	117
Figure 9.5. The absorbance at 550nm of solutions containing FOX2 reagent and peroxides in the range 10 to 250 μ M	118

Figure 9.6. Kinetics of macrophage-mediated LDL oxidation	119
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List of tables

Table 3.1. Composition of diets used in preliminary studies	50
Table 4.1. Results of trial investigating human apoB-transgenic mice	60
Table 5.1. Composition of diets used to investigate dietary fats	67
Table 5.2. Fatty acid composition of diets used to investigate dietary fats	68
Table 5.3. Results of trial investigating dietary fats	70
Table 6.1. Composition of diets used to investigate antioxidants and alcohol	80
Table 6.2. Results of trial investigating antioxidants	81
Table 7.1. Results of trial investigating alcohol	91
Table 8.1. Composition of diets used to investigate conjugated linoleic acids	98
Table 8.2. Results of trial investigating conjugated linoleic acids	99
Table 9.1. Results of human antioxidant supplementation study	109