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RADIO-IMMUNOASSAYS OF ANABOLIC HORMONES

IN YOUNG RUMINANTS

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ABSTRACT

Four experiments with young calves and one with ewes and lambs are described, all of which involved taking blood samples via a jugular catheter. Plasma samples were all assayed for insulin and growth hormone by radio-immunoassays. In Experiments 1 - 4, prolactin assays were also carried out, and results of plasma glucose assays were presented for Experiments 2 - 4.

In Experiments 1 and 5, the effect of suckling on starved calves and lambs was investigated. Insulin rose from <1 ng/ml to 2 - 7 ng/ml after suckling. Growth hormone and prolactin did not change systematically in any way after suckling in calves, but lambs' growth hormone levels increased from <2 ng/ml to >10 ng/ml at the onset of suckling, as did the GH levels in plasma of their dams.

In Experiments 2 and 4, the effect of changing plasma energy substrate levels was investigated in calves. In Experiment 2, it was observed that a 30-second jugular infusion of either volatile fatty acids in an equimolecular mixture of acetate, propionate and butyrate, or glucose (both administered at 1.25 mM per kg body weight (bw)) resulted in a variable, but significant increase in insulin levels, but had no effect on growth hormone or prolactin. The results of 1.4 mM per kg bw glucose administration in Experiment 4, confirmed those of Experiment 2. Administration of 0.75 U per kg bw of protamine zinc insulin resulted in a prolonged hypoglycaemia, which was achieved more slowly in five-week-old calves than in week-old calves. Growth hormone and prolactin levels did not respond

immediately to insulin administration, but after hypoglycaemia had been maintained for 2 - 3 hours, growth hormone levels decreased from 4 - 8 ng/ml to <3 ng/ml in calves of both one week and five weeks of age, and prolactin levels increased slightly.

The effect of a 30-second infusion of 0.3 g per kg bw arginine on calves was tested in Experiment 3, and significant increases in all plasma measurements except growth hormone were observed. Increases of both insulin and glucose were higher in five-week-old milk-fed calves than they were in week-old calves or in five-week-old ruminant calves, and in all calves the glucose increase was quickly followed by a decrease in glucose levels to a deep hypoglycaemia. The prolactin response was smaller and more prolonged in week-old calves than in the older calves. Saline which was infused in an equi-osmolar solution to arginine, resulted in decreases in both growth hormone and prolactin. The results of Experiment 3 are contrasted with those of Experiment 5, in which a 0.5 g per kg bw arginine dose was infused over a 30-minute period into ewes and lambs. The insulin responses were smaller than those of calves, but the growth hormone levels increased significantly from <2 ng/ml to >4 ng/ml.

In addition to the experimental results described above, radio-immunoassays were described in detail, because all work utilised antibodies raised by the author during the course of study.

PREFACE

Plasma levels of insulin, growth hormone and prolactin have been measured in calves and lambs, with special reference to the change in energy substrate metabolism which occurs as a result of the transition from pre-ruminant to the ruminant mode of digestion. Whereas lambs' plasma hormone levels have been extensively studied in this respect, the literature contains very few references to those of young calves. Thus it was of interest to compare and contrast results obtained with calves and lambs, but to concentrate four out of the five experiments on calves.

Changes in plasma levels of the hormones and of glucose were measured in response to several acute stimuli, chosen for their significance either in relation to energy substrate metabolism, or the anabolic functions of the three hormones under investigation. The stimuli tested were as follows:

- (i) The effect of suckling
- (ii) The effect of rapid infusions of
 - (a) Glucose
 - (b) Volatile fatty acid mixture
 - (c) Insulin
 - (d) Arginine

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
PREFACE	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
CHAPTER ONE	
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	1
1.1	
INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	
INSULIN, GROWTH HORMONE AND PROLACTIN LEVELS	4
1.2.1	
Stimuli for secretion of insulin	4
1.2.1(a)	
Plasma metabolites	4
1.2.1(b)	
Other hormones	5
(i) Enteric hormones	5
(ii) Glucagon	6
(iii) Growth hormone	6
1.2.1(c)	
The adrenergic system	7
1.2.2	
Stimuli for secretion of growth hormone	8
1.2.2(a)	
Plasma metabolites and their relationship to growth hormone action	8
(i) Amino acids	9
(ii) Energy substrate levels	10
1.2.2(b)	
Different physiological states	15
(i) Age and reproductive status	15
(ii) Lactation	17
(iii) Sleep and diurnal variation	18
1.2.2(c)	
The adrenergic system	20
(i) Adverse environmental stimuli and epinephrine levels	20
(ii) Hypothalamic influence on growth hormone secretion	22

		<u>Page</u>
1.2.2(d)	Somatomedins and other peptides related to growth hormone	24
1.2.3	Stimuli for secretion of prolactin	28
1.2.3(a)	Plasma metabolites	28
1.2.3(b)	Different physiological states	29
	(i) Lactation	29
	(ii) Age and reproductive status	30
1.2.3(c)	The adrenergic system	31
	(i) Adverse environmental stimuli	31
	(ii) Hypothalamic influence on prolactin secretion	31
1.3	DIGESTION AND METABOLISM IN YOUNG RUMINANTS	33
1.3.1	Anatomical development of the digestive system	33
1.3.2	Functional development of the digestive system	34
1.3.3	Changes in post-prandial metabolism and endocrinology with development of the young ruminant	36
1.4	RATIONALE OF THE PRESENT STUDY	40
CHAPTER TWO	MATERIALS, METHODS AND DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS	43
2.1	ANIMALS, CATHETERISATION AND BLOOD SAMPLING	43
2.1.1	Animals and catheterisation	43
2.1.2	Health and maintenance of calves	44
2.1.3	Blood sampling	47
2.2	PLASMA GLUCOSE ASSAY	47
2.2.1	Method	47
2.2.2	Results	48

		<u>Page</u>
2.3	RADIO-IMMUNOASSAY PROCEDURE	49
2.3.1	Hormones used in radio-immunoassays	49
2.3.2	Procedure for raising antibodies and isolating carrier protein	49
2.3.3	^{125}I -labelled hormones	50
2.3.3(a)	Preparation	50
2.3.3(b)	Purification	52
2.3.4	Diluent plasma	54
2.3.5	Procedure for each assay	55
2.4	VALIDATION OF RADIO-IMMUNOASSAYS	58
2.4.1	Investigation into parallelism	58
2.4.1(a)	Introduction	58
2.4.1(b)	Assessment of parallelism	62
	(i) Methods	62
	(ii) Results	64
	(iii) Discussion	68
2.4.1(c)	Concentration of reagents	70
	(i) Methods	70
	(ii) Results	73
	(iii) Discussion	73
2.4.1(d)	Precipitation reaction	74
	(i) Methods	74
	(ii) Results	78
	(iii) Discussion	81
2.4.1(e)	Molecular structure of the hormone	84
	(i) Methods	84
	(ii) Results	87
	(iii) Discussion	89

		<u>Page</u>
2.4.1(f)	Diluent plasma and anticoagulants	91
	(i) Methods	91
	(ii) Results	92
	(iii) Discussion	92
2.4.2	Precision, sensitivity and specificity	93
2.4.2(a)	Precision	93
	(i) Method	93
	(ii) Results	95
	(iii) Discussion	99
2.4.2(b)	Sensitivity	100
	(i) Method	100
	(ii) Results	101
	(iii) Discussion	101
2.4.2(c)	Specificity	101
	(i) Method	101
	(ii) Results and Discussion	102
2.5	STATISTICAL METHODS	102
CHAPTER THREE	EXPERIMENTAL SECTION	104
3.1	EXPERIMENT 1	104
3.1.1	Experimental design	104
3.1.2	Results	106
3.1.2(a)	Diurnal pattern of hormone secretion	106
3.1.2(b)	Suckling and plasma hormone levels	117
3.1.3	Discussion	118
3.1.4	Conclusions	122

		<u>Page</u>
3.2	EXPERIMENT 2	124
3.2.1	Experimental design	124
3.2.2	Results	126
3.2.3	Discussion	134
3.2.4	Conclusions	136
3.3	EXPERIMENT 3	138
3.3.1	Experimental design	138
3.3.2	Results	140
3.3.3	Discussion	156
3.3.4	Conclusions	163
3.4	EXPERIMENT 4	165
3.4.1	Experimental design	165
3.4.2	Results	167
3.4.3	Discussion	179
3.4.3(a)	Saline treatment	179
3.4.3(b)	Glucose treatment	180
3.4.3(c)	Insulin treatment	181
3.4.4	Conclusions	186
3.5	EXPERIMENT 5: WORK WITH LAMBS AND EWES	188
3.5.1	Experimental design	188
3.5.2	Results	189
3.5.3	Discussion	199
3.5.4	Conclusions	202
3.6	GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	204
	APPENDIX	207

Page

POST SCRIPT

218

REFERENCES

221

LIST OF FIGURES

		<u>Page</u>
Figure 1	Gel filtration of ^{125}I -bovine GH after 1 month's storage at -20°C , on Sephadex G-100 equilibrated with 0.025 M borate buffer at pH 8.4.	51
Figure 2	Gel filtration of ^{125}I -bovine GH after 5 days' storage and $3\frac{1}{2}$ months' storage at -20°C on Sephadex G-100 equilibrated with 0.025 M borate buffer at pH 8.4.	53
Figure 3	Standard curve of an insulin assay including the level of non-specific binding of ^{125}I -insulin in each tube. ^{125}I radiation level in tubes containing two dilutions of each plasma sample are represented.	59
Figure 4	Slopes, together with 95% fiducial limits of slopes, obtained by transforming standard curves and dilutions of unknown plasma samples, to straight lines by logit/log transformation.	66
Figure 5	Percentage of ^{125}I -bovine GH which was bound, with varying dilutions of antibodies and varying amounts of ^{125}I -bovine GH.	71
Figure 6	Standard curves of GH assays with two different dilutions of first antibodies	72
Figure 7	Percentage of ^{125}I -insulin which was bound, with varying amounts of GPV in the assay tubes, and in the presence of different plasma or protein.	75
Figure 8	Standard curves of GH assays, to show the effect on parallelism of changing the dilution of second antibodies.	76
Figure 9	Standard curve of GH assay, with second antibodies at a final dilution of 1:64, assaying hormone levels in calf and cow plasma.	77
Figure 10	Percentage of ^{125}I -GH which was bound, with varying dilutions of second antibodies added with varying concentrations of ammonium sulphate.	79

Figure 11	Standard curves of GH assays with second antibodies added according to Table III, or with antibodies pre-reacted.	80
Figure 12	Gel filtration of lyophilised GH, after 10 months' storage in a dessiccator at 4 °C, on Sephadex G-100 equilibrated with 0.05 M phosphate buffer + 0.01 M EDTA at pH 7.4.	85
Figure 13	Gel filtration of ¹²⁵ I-bovine GH or of immunoreactive GH in whole calf plasma, on Sephadex G-100 equilibrated with 0.05 M phosphate buffer + 0.01 M EDTA at pH 7.4.	86
Figure 14	Gel filtration of ¹²⁵ I-bovine GH on Sephadex G-100 equilibrated with 0.025 M borate buffer at pH 8.4. ¹²⁵ I radiation of each fraction compared with the ability of each fraction to be bound in a RIA.	88
Figure 15	Plasma insulin level in individual calves sampled at 30-minute intervals.	107
Figure 16	Plasma GH level in individual calves samples at 30-minute intervals.	108
Figure 17	Plasma prolactin level in individual calves sampled at 30-minute intervals.	109
Figure 18	Mean values of plasma insulin, GH and prolactin levels of seven calves sampled at 30-minute intervals.	110
Figure 19	Plasma insulin levels of individual calves sampled before, during and after suckling from a cow.	111-112
Figure 20	Plasma GH levels of individual calves sampled before, during and after suckling from a cow.	113-114
Figure 21	Plasma prolactin levels of individual calves sampled before, during and after suckling from a cow.	115-116

Figure 22	Effect of glucose treatment: plasma levels of glucose, insulin, GH and prolactin.	127
Figure 23	Effect of VFA treatment: plasma levels of glucose, insulin, GH and prolactin.	129
Figure 24	Effect of salicylate treatment: plasma levels of glucose, insulin, GH, and prolactin.	131
Figure 25	Plasma levels of glucose in individual calves on control day.	142
Figure 26	Plasma levels of insulin in individual calves on control day.	143
Figure 27	Plasma levels of GH in individual calves on control day.	144
Figure 28	Plasma levels of prolactin in individual calves on control day.	145
Figure 29	Plasma levels of glucose: mean for values obtained on arginine treatment days, on saline treatment days and on control days.	147
Figure 30	Plasma levels of insulin: mean for values obtained on arginine treatment days, on saline treatment days and on control days.	149
Figure 31	Plasma levels of GH: mean for values obtained on arginine treatment days, on saline treatment days and on control days.	151
Figure 32	Plasma levels of prolactin: mean for values obtained on arginine treatment days, on saline treatment days and on control days.	153
Figure 33	Mean GH levels after arginine - mean GH levels after saline.	155
Figure 34	Average of medians for individual calves, of hormone levels in plasma samples taken on control day during Experiment 3 and Experiment 4.	167

Figure 35	Plasma glucose levels: mean for values obtained on insulin, glucose and saline treatment days.	169
Figure 36	Plasma insulin levels: mean for values obtained on insulin, glucose and saline treatment days.	171
Figure 37	Plasma GH levels: mean for values obtained on insulin, glucose and saline treatment days.	173
Figure 38	Plasma prolactin levels: mean for values obtained on insulin, glucose and saline treatment days.	175
Figure 39	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after feeding in suckling lambs and lactating ewes.	191
Figure 40	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after arginine treatment in suckling lambs and lactating ewes.	193
Figure 41	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after feeding in weaned lambs and non-lactating ewes.	195
Figure 42	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after arginine treatment in weaned lambs and non-lactating ewes.	197
Figure 43	Body weights of each calf for the duration of Experiment 2.	209
Figure 44	Body weights of each calf for the duration of Experiment 3.	210
Figure 45	Amount of meal eaten during each week of Experiment 3, by individual calves of group R.	212
Figures 46-48	Rectal temperatures of calves during sampling days of Experiment 3.	213-215
Figure 49	Body weights of each calf for the duration of Experiment 4.	216
Figure 50	Standard curves of prolactin assays with different second antibodies and varying incubation times.	218

LIST OF TABLES

Table I	Composition of meal fed to calves.	45
Table II	Daily energy requirements of calves, and digestible energy of milk and meal.	46
Table III	Reagents and procedures for radio-immunoassays.	56
Table IV	Variance components from the analysis of two insulin assays; data read from raw standard curves.	65
Table V	95% fiducial limits of hormone concentration assessments from raw standard curves, for two insulin assays: based on residual variance.	65
Table VI	Discrepancy between results obtained from standard curve slope, and from unknown sample slope, as measured after transforming slopes to a straight line in two insulin assays.	67
Table VII	Percentage binding achieved by double antibody radio-immunoassay compared with the use of polyethylene glycol.	81
Table VIII	Precision at given hormone levels, region of maximum precision, and sensitivity, of two assays for each hormone.	95
Table IX	Variance components from insulin levels of four plasma samples assayed repeatedly in ten insulin assays.	96
Table X	Estimates of insulin levels in four standard plasma samples measured in ten assays.	96
Table XI	Variance components from GH levels of three plasma samples assayed repeatedly in ten GH assays.	97
Table XII	Estimates of GH levels in three standard plasma samples measured in ten assays.	97
Table XIII	Variance components from prolactin levels of two plasma samples assayed in two groups of ten assays.	98

Table XIV	Estimates of prolactin levels in two standard plasma samples measured in two groups of ten assays.	98
Table XV	Techniques used to transform data in order to standardise the variance at all hormone levels.	103
Table XVI	Calves and blood sampling in Experiment 1.	105-106
Table XVII	Calves used in Experiment 2.	124
Table XVIII	Overall experimental design.	124
Table XIX	Weekly treatment procedure of Experiment 2.	125
Table XX	Observations after infusions of volatile fatty acids.	126
Table XXI	Glucose treatment: mean values of glucose, insulin, GH and prolactin for different sample times on days of glucose and saline treatment.	128
Table XXII	VFA treatment: mean values of glucose, insulin, GH and prolactin in plasma for different sample times on days of VFA and saline treatment.	130
Table XXIII	Salicylate treatment: mean values of glucose, insulin, GH and prolactin in plasma for different sample times on days of salicylate and saline treatment.	132
Table XXIV	Plasma insulin levels in individual calves in the first sample after glucose and VFA treatments.	133
Table XXV	Relationship between insulin responsiveness and basal GH levels.	133
Table XXVI	Experimental groups of calves used in Experiment 3.	138
Table XXVII	Experimental procedure for each five-day treatment period in Experiment 3.	139

Table XXVIII	Average of medians and ranges for individual calves of samples taken on control day.	146
Table XXIX a	Plasma glucose levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	148
Table XXIX b	Plasma glucose levels: significance of differences between groups of calves after arginine treatment, adjusted for pre-treatment means.	148
Table XXX a	Plasma insulin levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	150
Table XXXb	Plasma insulin levels: significance of differences between groups of calves after arginine treatment, adjusted for pre-treatment means.	150
Table XXXI	Plasma GH levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	152
Table XXXII a	Plasma prolactin levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	154
Table XXXII b	Plasma prolactin levels: significance of differences between groups of calves after arginine treatment, adjusted for pre-treatments means.	154
Table XXXIII	Experimental procedure for each six-day sampling period.	166
Table XXXIV	Average of medians and ranges for individual calves of samples taken on control day.	168
Table XXXV a	Plasma glucose levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	170
Table XXXV b	Plasma glucose levels: significance of differences between groups of calves at particular times after treatment.	170
Table XXXVI a	Plasma insulin levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	172

Table XXXVI b	Plasma insulin levels: significance of differences between groups of calves at particular times after treatment.	172
Table XXXVII a	Plasma GH levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	174
Table XXXVII b	Plasma GH levels: significance of difference between groups of calves at particular times after treatment.	174
Table XXXVIIIa	Plasma prolactin levels: mean values for different sample times on days of three different treatments.	176
Table XXXVIIIb	Plasma prolactin levels: significance of differences between groups of calves at particular times after treatment.	176
Table XXXIX	Average of medians and ranges for individual lambs and ewes, of insulin and GH levels in plasma samples taken before feeding or arginine treatment.	190
Table XL	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after feeding in suckling lambs and lactating ewes.	192
Table XLI	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after arginine treatment in suckling lambs and lactating ewes.	194
Table XLII a	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after feeding in weaned lambs and non-lactating ewes.	196
Table XLII b	Significance of the difference between feeding effects on suckling lambs versus weaned lambs, and on lactating ewes versus non-lactating ewes.	196
Table XLIII a	Plasma levels of insulin and GH before and after arginine treatment in weaned lambs and non-lactating ewes.	198
Table XLIII b	Significance of the difference between arginine effects on suckling lambs versus weaned lambs, and on lactating ewes versus non-lactating ewes.	198

Table XLIV	Results of insulin levels in twenty calf plasma samples, as calculated in three different ways, using data from two different plasma dilutions, from two insulin assays described on pages 62 - 70.	207-208
Table XLV	Average growth rate of each calf for the duration of Experiment 2.	209
Table XLVI	Average growth rate of each calf for the duration of Experiment 3.	211
Table XLVII	Average growth rate of each calf for the duration of Experiment 4.	217
Table XLVIII	Body weights of lambs and ewes in Experiment 5.	217