Lithium carbonate and breast-feeding

Lithium carbonate taken during pregnancy has been associated with neonatal hypotonia and congenital heart disease. There is little information on lithium concentrations in human breast milk or in the serum of breast-fed infants. We have studied such a case.

Case report

A 36-year-old woman, gravida 1, para 0+1, had been taking lithium carbonate for manic depressive psychosis for seven years when pregnancy was confirmed at eight weeks. The pregnancy was allowed to continue. Initially maintained at 800 mg daily, the dose was reduced twice during pregnancy to maintain therapeutic serum levels (see figure). Her mood was more stable than at any previous time, and she needed no other medication apart from routine haematins. At 38 weeks she went into spontaneous labour lasting 12 hours and received protective forceps for suspected prematurity.

Six hours before delivery she was given pethidine hydrochloride (Pethilorfan) 100 mg and promazine hydrochloride 50 mg. A boy was born weighing 3450 g. He was mildly hypotonic for the first two days. An electrocardiogram showed nothing abnormal, and the blood count and blood sugar level were normal; the lower femoral epiphysis was present.

The mother was anxious to breast-feed and this was established within six days. Lithium concentrations in the serum of the mother’s pooled breast milk and the baby’s urine were all monitored closely. The mother’s serum level fell over the time of delivery, and the oral dose was doubled to achieve satisfactory serum levels. The baby’s level was similar to the mother’s at delivery but fell rapidly to 0.030 mmol/l by the sixth day and then rose slightly once breast-feeding was established. Despite a considerable rise in the mother’s serum and breast milk levels there was no appreciable rise in the baby’s serum level. He thrived and developed normally. Serial 12-hour collections of his urine on days six to nine inclusive gave lithium concentrations of 0.57, 1.20, 0.45, 0.64, 0.25, 0.30, 0.63, and 0.50 mmol/l. The mother became less anxious to breast-feed and stopped during the tenth week. Tests of thyroid function and bone chemistry were then normal.

Comment

The similar serum lithium levels for mother and baby at delivery confirmed that there is free exchange across the placenta. The baby’s serum level of lithium fell rapidly in the first week of life as reported. The mean urinary concentration was 0.57 mmol/l, which was almost 10 times the mean serum level, and this shows that the neonatal kidney is capable of excreting lithium against a concentration gradient. Breast-milk lithium levels were about half maternal serum levels and rose with an increase in the oral dose. Despite the rise in concentration achieved in breast milk, the baby’s serum levels remained constantly low—much lower than the level to which he had been exposed during pregnancy. Breast-feeding was discouraged and finally stopped at 10 weeks because of the known inhibition by lithium of cyclic 3'5'-adenosine monophosphate and the theoretical risk to the developing brain.

Since the mother was being treated for manic depressive psychosis we thought that the act of breast-feeding might be therapeutic. The baby will require further close follow-up, but the benefits from breast-feeding appeared to outweigh any possible risk from lithium in the neonatal period.

We thank Sister L Curtis, Mrs A Sanderson, and the biochemistry laboratory for their help.

Meningitis caused by group R haemolytic streptococci

We report a case of meningitis caused by infection with group R haemolytic streptococci, probably the first case to be described in Britain.

Case report

A 63-year-old man cut his hand while operating a machine smeared with bacon fat at a pork pie factory. That evening he felt unwell, began to sweat, and developed rigors. Next morning he complained of pain in both hips, and was admitted to a local cottage hospital. The same day he became drowsy and developed meningism. He was transferred to the district general hospital. Lumbar puncture confirmed bacterial meningitis (white cell count 1.5 × 10³/mm³), mainly neutrophils, with Gram-positive diplococci, proteins 2.1 g/l (210 mg/100 ml), and glucose 2.69 mmol/l (48 mg/100 ml). Culture of the cerebrospinal fluid grew a beta-haemolytic streptococcus on blood agar. The organism was resistant to bacitracin and grew on MacConkey’s medium. The isolate could not be grouped with antisera for groups A, B, C, D, E, F, or G streptococci. The Cross-infection Reference Laboratory reported the organism to be a member of group R which had failed to grow in the presence of 10% bile or 4% NaCl at pH 9.6 or at 45°C and did not resist heat at 60°C for 30 minutes. Arginine and esculin were hydrolysed, the Voges-Proskauer test result was negative, and polysaccharide was not formed from sucrose. Acid was produced from trehalose, lactose, raffinose, salicin, inulin, sucrose, and melibiose but not from sorbitol, mannitol, arabinose, melezitose, or dulcitol after five days. A similar organism was isolated from the blood. Purulent fluid was aspirated from the left hip joint, but no organism was cultured probably because the patient had already received several doses of penicillin.

He was treated with penicillin G 10 000 units intrathecally and 2 million units intravenously every two hours for the first 12 hours, then 1 million units intravenously four hourly for seven days. He improved considerably within 48 hours of starting treatment. His final recovery was complicated by a deep vein thrombosis. On discharge from hospital the only residua were high-tone deafness in the left ear associated with some vertigo.

Discussion

Haemolytic streptococci were implicated in septicaemic infections in pigs in 1954 by Field et al. and by de Moor in 1959. They continued to be isolated from pigs and piglets in England and elsewhere in Europe. In Denmark in 1968 Perch et al. recorded two cases of
mенингит и ишемическая болезнь почек. Больные, которые были изолированы из Нидерландов и Дании, были на все агрессивные и септические инфекции. Одна из программ позаимствована из этих фактов, и даже упоминая о его происхождении, не идентифицирован. Изолированный случай, однако, показал, что инфекция могла быть вызвана из его инфекции. Вывозные организмы и другие комбинации, а также случаи, которые были зарегистрированы в течение последних дней, показали, что у больных почечной недостаточности, которая не была впервые зарегистрирована из одного из пациентов, и были представлены здоровыми по длительное время.

We thank the staff of the Public Health Laboratory, Gloucester, for the initial investigations, the staff of the Cross-infection Reference Laboratory, Central Public Health Laboratory, Colindale, London, for specialist advice, and Dr R F Jarrett for permission to report this case. The case reported here is referred to by Windsor and Elliott in a footnote to their paper on streptococcal infection in young pigs.

1 Field, H I, Bunton, D, and Dove, J T, Veterinary Record, 1954, 66, 453.
2 de Moor, C E, Verslagen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Vleesvoedeekund, 1959, 2, 474.

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Low molecular weight dextran: a continuing cause of acute renal failure

Low molecular weight dextran (LMWD), though not usually considered to be highly nephrotoxic, may precipitate acute renal failure (ARF) in certain conditions. It may be the commonest cause of drug-induced ARF. Seven out of eight cases of drug-induced ARF referred to this unit from several hospitals during a recent eight-month period were caused by LMWD (10%, dextran 40 in six cases and 6%, dextran 70 in one case). All seven patients had ischaemic disorders.

Case histories of seven patients with acute renal failure after administration of low molecular weight dextran

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Primary diagnosis</th>
<th>Dose of 10% dextran 40</th>
<th>Initial plasma urea concentration (mmol/l)</th>
<th>Initial urine volume (ml/day)</th>
<th>Duration of decline</th>
<th>Duration of complete anuria</th>
<th>Type and duration of dialysis</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Diabetic gangrene of left foot</td>
<td>4 l in 2 days</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>28 days</td>
<td>Peritonial, 4 weeks</td>
<td>Leg amputated after ARF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ischaemic left leg, mesenteric ischaemia</td>
<td>3 l in 3 days</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>11 days</td>
<td>Peritonial, 15 days</td>
<td>Chronic pyelonephritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ischaemic right foot</td>
<td>5 l in 5 days</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>Peritonial, 6 days</td>
<td>Leg recovered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Left brachial embolus</td>
<td>2 l in 2 days</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>12 hrs</td>
<td>Not needed</td>
<td>Foot improved after phenol sympathetic block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Left popliteal embolus</td>
<td>6 l in 5 days</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>14 days</td>
<td>Peritonial and haemodialysis</td>
<td>Encephalomyelitis due to local anaesthetic. Early treatment with frusemide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Diabetic gangrene of left foot</td>
<td>5 l in 5 days</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>450 ml/day</td>
<td>Not needed</td>
<td>Leg amputated after ARF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Polycythaemia, Ischaemic left foot</td>
<td>5 l in 5 days</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>Not measured</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>Haemodialysis, 7 days</td>
<td>Died of pneumonitis and disseminated intra-vascular coagulopathy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dose refers to 6% dextran 70. ARF = acute renal failure. Conversion: SI to traditional units—plasma urea: 1 mmol/l = 6 mg/100 ml.

Comment

Dextran of molecular weights below 60 000 easily filter through the glomerulus. They may accumulate in proximal tubular cells giving the swollen, vacuolated appearance of "osmotic nephropathy," although this appearance does not correlate with changes in renal function. The high viscosity of concentrated dextran probably causes renal dysfunction by tubular plugging. Damage is more likely to occur when renal perfusion is reduced—a probable factor in cases 2, 4, and 7—or if renal damage is already present, as in patients 2 and 6. Maintenance of diuresis with fluids and diuretics may protect the kidneys and may have prevented the need for dialysis in cases 4 and 6, who were referred and treated before anuria occurred.

Except in cases 1 and 5 the total dosage of LMWD was within the accepted therapeutic range, but treatment was continued despite falling urine volumes. The occurrence of anuria with 6% dextran 70 in patient 7 is unusual, as only a small proportion of the dextran in this solution are filtered through the glomerulus.

The uses of LMWD are limited. When it is indicated its propensity to cause ARF should be remembered and the following therapeutic rules observed: (1) do not infuse faster than 1 l/day; (2) do not give if the urine output is below 1500 ml/day; (3) withdraw if the specific gravity of the urine rises above 1045; (4) do not give if the blood urea is above 10 mmol/l (60 mg/100 ml). A reduced urine output indicates that LMWD should be withdrawn and diuresis induced with diuretics and a high fluid intake.

Strict adherence to these rules would probably have prevented all the cases of LMWD-induced renal failure reported here.


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