The effect of dietary supplementation using isomeric blends of conjugated linoleic acid on lipid metabolism in healthy human subjects

Enda J. Noone*, Helen M. Roche, Anne P. Nugent and Michael J. Gibney
Unit of Nutrition, Department of Clinical Medicine, Trinity Centre for Health Sciences, St James’s Hospital, Dublin 8, Republic of Ireland

(Received 2 August 2001 – Revised 1 March 2002 – Accepted 5 April 2002)

Conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) refers to a group of positional and geometric isomers of linoleic acid. Studies using animal models have shown that CLA reduces adiposity, improves plasma lipoprotein metabolism and insulin sensitivity and reduces arteriosclerosis. Whilst CLA may have therapeutic potential with regard to coronary artery disease risk factors in human subjects, there has been little investigation into its effects in human subjects. This current study investigated the effects of dietary supplementation using two isomeric blends of CLA on triacylglycerol (TAG)-rich lipoprotein metabolism and reverse cholesterol transport in human subjects and evaluates whether CLA modulated cardiovascular disease risk factors. Fifty-one normolipidaemic subjects participated in this randomised double-blind placebo-controlled intervention trial. Subjects were randomly assigned to receive 3 g cis-9,trans-11–trans-10,cis-12 isomeric blend (50:50) or a cis-9,trans-11–trans-10,cis-12 isomeric blend (80:20) CLA or linoleic acid (control)/d for 8 weeks. The 50:50 CLA isomer blend significantly reduced (P<0.005) fasting plasma TAG concentrations. The 80:20 CLA isomer blend significantly reduced (P<0.05) VLDL-cholesterol concentrations. CLA supplementation had no significant effect on LDL-cholesterol, HDL-lipid-protein composition or reverse cholesterol transport. CLA supplementation had no effect on body weight, plasma glucose and insulin concentrations. Fatty acid analysis revealed that the cis-9,trans-11 CLA isomer was incorporated into total plasma lipids following supplementation with both isomeric blends of CLA. The present study demonstrates that CLA supplementation significantly improves plasma TAG and VLDL metabolism in human subjects. The study confirms that some of the cardio-protective effects of CLA that were shown in animal studies are relevant to man.

Conjugated linoleic acid: Triacylglycerol: Very-low-density lipoprotein: Low-density lipoprotein: High-density lipoprotein

Conjugated linoleic acid is the term used to describe a mixture of positional and geometric isomers of linoleic acid, with conjugated double bonds, which may be of cis or trans configuration at positions 9 and 11 or 10 and 12 (Ha et al. 1987). CLA is a natural food constituent, produced by the intestinal flora of ruminant animals (Kepler et al. 1970) and is found in the lipid fraction of meat and dairy products. Chin et al. (1992) estimated the daily intake of CLA in human subjects to be 160 mg/d. Several animal studies have established that CLA has profound effects on lipoprotein metabolism and prevents diet-induced atherosclerosis. Lee et al. (1994) showed that CLA significantly reduced plasma triacylglycerol (TAG) and LDL-cholesterol concentrations and demonstrated that cholesterol deposition in the aorta was 30% less in the CLA-fed rabbits. Nicolosi et al. (1997) demonstrated that CLA supplementation significantly reduced plasma TAG (−28%) and cholesterol (−26%) concentrations, which were associated with a significant reduction of aortic streak formation (−26%) in hypercholesterolaemic hamsters fed an atherogenic diet. In contrast, Munday et al. (1999) showed that CLA promoted fatty streak formation in C57BL/6 mice fed an atherogenic diet. This occurred despite the fact that CLA treatment improved the lipoprotein profile. Kritchevsky et al. (2000) completed an intensive investigation into the dose–response effect of CLA on the progression and regression of atherosclerosis in rabbits and demonstrated that CLA supplementation...
caused substantial (−30%) regression of established atherosclerosis. CLA improves insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance (Houseknecht et al. 1998) and reduced adiposity (Park et al. 1999) in several animal models. Therefore, CLA could be a therapeutic nutrient capable of reducing the risk of obesity, diabetes and CHD in human subjects. Two recent human studies (Benito et al. 2001; Smedman & Vessby, 2001) have shown that CLA supplementation at 3·9 g/d for 63 d and 4·2 g/d for 12 weeks respectively had no significant effect on plasma lipid concentrations.

Reverse cholesterol transport refers to the process whereby cholesterol in peripheral tissues is transferred to the liver via lipoproteins (Tall, 1998). It represents the only form of cholesterol clearance from the circulation, hence it may have a protective effect against atherosclerosis. The cholesteryl ester transfer protein (CETP) is a key enzyme in this process. It catalyses the transfer of cholesteryl esters and TAG between VLDL and HDL. HDL-cholesterol concentrations are inversely related to VLDL-TAG concentrations (Nestel et al. 1997; Munday et al. 1999) and VLDL- (Stangl, 2000) TAG concentrations. Therefore, the reductions in plasma TAG concentrations associated with CLA intake would be expected to improve LDL- and HDL-cholesterol metabolism, which may be mediated, in part, through the activities of CETP. Evidence to date from animal experiments demonstrates that CLA supplementation has no effect on HDL-cholesterol concentrations (Lee et al. 1994; Nicolosi et al. 1997; Stangl et al. 1999; Gavino et al. 2000). However, it is effective at reducing LDL: HDL ratios (Lee et al. 1994). The effect of CLA supplementation on the reverse cholesterol transport pathway has not been investigated in human subjects, but it may underlie the anti-atherogenic effect of CLA, which has been shown in several animal models.

The objective of the current study was to investigate the effects of dietary supplementation using two isomeric blends of CLA on: (1) plasma TAG and VLDL metabolism; (2) indices of reverse cholesterol metabolism, HDL composition, LDL-cholesterol, CETP mass and activity; (3) plasma glucose, insulin and non-esterified fatty acid concentrations in a large normolipidaemic group of human subjects. Two isomeric blends of CLA were used to determine the relative efficacy of the cis-9,trans-11 and trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomers on lipoprotein metabolism in human subjects. One group received an 80:20 isomeric blend of the cis-9,trans-11–trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomers (80:20 CLA group). Another group received a 50:50 isomeric blend of the cis-9,trans-11–trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomers (50:50 CLA group).

**Methods**

**Study subjects**

The present study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Federated Dublin Voluntary Hospitals. The present study was conducted on an outpatient basis. Fifty-one healthy, non-smoking volunteers, eighteen males and thirty-three females, with a mean age of 31·6 (SD 10·03) years, a mean weight of 68·53 (SD 11·23) kg and a mean BMI 23·33 (SD 4·5) kg/m² were recruited from the personnel of Trinity College and St James’s Hospital, Dublin, Republic of Ireland. All volunteers gave a written informed consent to participate in the study and adhered to the following inclusion criteria: BMI < 25 kg/m², fasting plasma cholesterol < 6·5 mmol/l, fasting plasma TAG < 2 mmol/l, fasting γ-glutamyl transferase < 60 IU, haemoglobin > 110 mg/l, < 90 min strenuous exercise per week and were not habitual consumers of any fatty acid nutritional supplements or drugs known to affect lipid metabolism.

This was a randomised double-blind placebo-controlled study. Volunteers were randomly assigned into three groups receiving 3 g (one 1 g capsules) of: (1) 50:50 CLA isomer blend/d; or (2) 80:20 CLA isomer blend/d; or (3) linoleic acid/d. Supplements were taken each day in one dose with meals. CLA supplements were supplied by Loders Croklaan, B.V., Wormerveer, The Netherlands. Table 1 shows the fatty acid composition of the CLA supplements and the amounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>50:50 CLA isomer blend</th>
<th>80:20 CLA isomer blend</th>
<th>Control (linoleic acid)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatty acid composition (g/100 g fatty acids)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:0</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3·7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:0</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>1·3</td>
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<tr>
<td>18:1</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>28·8</td>
<td>24·2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:2</td>
<td>7·0</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>66·9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFA</td>
<td>7·0</td>
<td>5·9</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>3·9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLA isomers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total CLA</td>
<td>67·2</td>
<td>58·8</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cis-9,trans-11</td>
<td>31·0</td>
<td>44·9</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trans-10,cis-12</td>
<td>31·5</td>
<td>11·0</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trans-10,trans-12</td>
<td>2·4</td>
<td>1·1</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLA, conjugated linoleic acid; SFA, saturated fatty acid; ND, not detected.

*Supplements given as free fatty acid.

†Materials and analysis details kindly provided by Loders Croklaan, B.V., Wormerveer, The Netherlands.
of fatty acids consumed by each group. Study compliance was 96 % using a pill count and was also measured by the incorporation of the cis-9,trans-11 isomer of CLA into total plasma lipids.

Subjects attended the Nutrition Laboratory, at the Trinity Centre for Health Science, St James’s Hospital, for blood sampling between 07.30 and 08.00 hours following a 12 h overnight fast at weeks 0 and 8. Subjects were also asked to abstain from alcohol 24 h prior to blood sampling. Subjects were given a supply of capsules following blood sampling at week 0. Blood was taken into 10 ml EDTA vacutainer (Beckton & Dickinson, Plymouth, Devon, UK). Blood samples were centrifuged at 1000 g for 10 min at room temperature. Plasma for protein and lipid analysis was stored at −70°C.

**Laboratory methods**

Plasma samples were analysed for TAG (PAP; Biomerieux, Lyon, France) cholesterol (PAP; Biomerieux), non-esterified fatty acids (Acy1 Co A synthetase–acyl Co A oxidase; Wako Chemicals, GmbH, Neuss, Germany), glucose (Biomerieux), apolipoprotein (ApoA-I) (Biomerieux) and ApoB (Biomerieux) concentrations using an RA-XT clinical chemistry analyser (Technicon Inc., Tarrytown, NY, USA). Plasma insulin concentrations were measured using fluoro-immunoassay (AutoDELFIA Insulin kit; Wallac Oy, Turku, Finland). Total, HDL- and HDL3-cholesterol and apoA-I concentrations were measured using a RA-XT clinical chemistry analyser following the precipitation with both Immuno Quantolip total HDL precipitation reagent (Immuno AG, Vienna, Austria) and ApoB lipoproteins (Abbey & Nestel, 1994). CETP concentration of each sample was calculated by subtracting values for total HDL cholesterol and ApoA-I concentrations from values for HDL3 cholesterol and HDL3 apoA-I concentrations. CETP activity was determined using a radiolabel [3H]cholesterol reagent. CETP activity was measured by its ability to promote the transfer of radiolabelled cholesteryl ester from HDL3 to endogenous ApoB lipoproteins (Abbey & Nestel, 1994). CETP activity was measured using a microtitre ELISA plate reader (Titertek, Huntsville, AL, USA). Absorbance values of samples were measured using a microtitre ELISA plate reader (Titertek, Huntsville, AL, USA). CETP concentration of each sample was calculated using a CETP standard. Results were expressed as CETP mass in μg/ml.

**Measurement of cholesteryl ester transfer protein mass**

CETP mass was measured using an ELISA devised by Clarke et al. (1995). Capture and detection antibodies for CETP ELISA were obtained from Pfizer Pharmaceuticals (Gorton, CT, USA). Absorbance values of samples were measured using a microtiter ELISA plate reader (Titertek, Huntsville, AL, USA). CETP concentration of each sample was calculated using a CETP standard. Results were expressed as CETP mass in μg/ml.

**GC analysis of total plasma lipid fatty acid composition**

Total plasma lipids were isolated using the method derived by Folch et al. (1957). Lipid present in the organic phase was dried using a vortex evaporator (AGB Scientific,
Dublin, Republic of Ireland). When samples were dried, they were flushed with N₂, sealed to prevent lipid oxidation and stored at −20°C. Methyl esters of total plasma lipids were prepared by adding 0·5 ml 0·01 M-NaOH in dry methanol. Samples were vortexed and flushed with N₂ and then placed in a heating block at 60°C for 15 min. Boron trifluoride (0·75 ml) was then added to mixture, samples were vortexed and incubated at 60°C for 15 min. Lipids were extracted three times using 0·5 ml hexane. Samples were dried in a vortex evaporator and stored under N₂ at −20°C until analysis.

The fatty acid methyl ester composition of total plasma lipids for CLA analysis was analysed using a Shimadzu GC-14A GLC (Mason Technologies, Dublin, Republic of Ireland) that was fitted with a Shimadzu C-16A integrator. A CP Sil 88 fused silica column (50 m × 0·22 mm, 0·2 file thickness; Chrompack Ltd, Middelburg, The Netherlands) was fitted. N₂ was used as a carrier gas. Conditions for the GC analysis of plasma lipids were as follows. An initial column temperature of 120°C increased at 8°C/min to 180°C. Column temperature was held at 180°C for 40 min. Column temperature was increased at 4°C/min to 220°C and was held at 220°C for 15 min. Peaks were identified using a fatty acid methyl ester standard spiked with known concentrations of the cis-9, trans-11 and trans-10,cis-12 isomers of CLA. Fatty acids were identified by retention times compared with standard and fatty acid compositions and were calculated as % total fatty acids.

**Data analysis**

All statistical analysis was carried out on an Apple Macintosh statistical package Data Desk 4.1 (Data Description Inc., New York, NY, USA). Data for plasma TAG, HDL-cholesterol, HDL and ApoA-I concentrations were transformed to normal distribution using the data sets to give data a normal Gaussian distribution. One-way ANOVA investigated differences in baseline variables between the study groups. Repeated-measures ANOVA examining the treatment × time interaction was used to investigate statistical changes in biochemical variables following CLA intervention. Post-hoc statistical analysis (least significant difference) was used to ascertain which data points were significantly different when repeated-measures ANOVA showed a significant treatment × time interaction. A P value <0·05 was considered significant.

**Results**

**Characteristics of the study population**

Fifty-one subjects completed the dietary intervention. ANOVA demonstrated no significant differences, baseline variables were found between study groups at week 0 and following dietary intervention with regard to body weight, BMI and age as shown in Table 2.

**Effects of conjugated linoleic acid supplementation on plasma lipids, glucose, insulin, cholesteryl ester transfer protein mass and activity**

Plasma lipid, glucose and insulin concentrations and CETP mass and activity of the three supplementation groups at week 0 and week 8 are presented in Table 3. One-way ANOVA showed no significant difference in these variables between each of the study groups at week 0. Three-way ANOVA showed that plasma TAG concentrations were significantly (P≤0·005) reduced by the 50:50 CLA supplement. Plasma TAG concentrations were not significantly altered in the 80:20 CLA and linoleic-acid-supplementation groups. Plasma cholesterol, non-esterified fatty acids, glucose, insulin, CETP mass and activity remained unchanged in all the supplementation groups throughout the present study. There was no significant change in body weight in either the 50:50 or 80:20 CLA groups or the linoleic acid (control) group as a result of dietary supplementation over 8 weeks.

**Lipoprotein analysis for all groups at week 0 and week 8**

Lipid and protein concentrations of lipoproteins of all supplementation groups at week 0 and 8 are presented in Table 4. VLDL-TAG concentrations were reduced by 24·5 and 29·4 % in the 80:20 and 50:50 CLA groups respectively, however these changes did not reach significance. When both CLA treatment groups were combined, the reduction in VLDL-TAG concentrations was significant (P=0·05). VLDL-cholesterol concentrations were significantly (P≤0·05) reduced by 32·2 % in the 80:20 CLA group and non-significantly by 27·5 % in the 50:50 CLA group and non-significantly by 27·5 % in the 50:50 CLA group.

**Table 2. Comparison of study subjects between each group**

(Mean values and standard deviations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>50:50 CLA</th>
<th>80:20 CLA</th>
<th>Linoleic acid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 0</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Week 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>33·22</td>
<td>11·78</td>
<td>28·58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (kg)</td>
<td>65·56</td>
<td>8·26</td>
<td>68·07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI (kg/m²)</td>
<td>23·51</td>
<td>3·11</td>
<td>23·59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (n)/female (n)</td>
<td>6/10</td>
<td>10/7</td>
<td>3/8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLA, conjugated linoleic acid.
*One-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences between groups.
Table 3. Effect of dietary supplementation using isomeric blends of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and linoleic acid (3 g/d) for 8 weeks on plasma lipid, insulin, glucose concentrations and cholesteryl ester transfer protein (CETP) mass and activity*

(Mean values and standard deviations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>50 : 50 CLA group (n 16)</th>
<th>80 : 20 CLA group (n 17)</th>
<th>Control: linoleic acid (n 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Week 0</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Week 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol (mmol/l)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triacylglycerol (mmol/l)</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEFA (mmol/l)</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.95†††</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glucose (mmol/l)</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulin (IU/ml)</td>
<td>10.76</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CETP activity (cholesteryl ester transfer) (%)</td>
<td>19.26</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>20.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CETP mass (mg/ml)</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NEFA, non-esterified fatty acid.
* For details of supplements, subjects and procedures, see Tables 1 and 2 and p. 244.
Repeated-measures ANOVA showed significant treatment time interaction: †††P≤0.005.

Discussion

Plasma triacylglycerol and VLDL metabolism

Plasma TAG concentration was significantly reduced by 20 % in the 50:50 CLA group. The magnitude of the reduction in plasma TAG concentrations is comparable with that achieved following CLA supplementation in the animal studies (Nicolosi et al. 1997; Munday et al. 1999). Nicolosi et al. (1997) demonstrated that there was a 28 and 36 % reduction in plasma TAG concentrations following a CLA diet at 0.06 and 0.11 % energy for 11 weeks in hamsters. Benito et al. (2001) and Smedman & Vessby (2001) both showed that CLA supplementation had no significant effect on plasma lipid concentrations in human subjects. While Houseknecht et al. (1999) demonstrated that CLA has anti-diabetic properties by improving insulin...
sensitivity in Zucker diabetic rats. Recent in vitro and animal studies suggest that the individual CLA isomers may have different effects on lipid metabolism. We used two isomeric blends of CLA to determine whether providing different proportions of the cis-9,trans-11 and trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomers had different effects on lipoprotein metabolism in human subjects. The 50:50 CLA supplement significantly reduced plasma TAG concentrations, but the 80:20 CLA supplement did not. These results suggest the trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomer may be the effective hypotriacylglycerolaemic isomer. These findings are in agreement with Lin et al. (2001), who found that the pure trans-10,cis-12 was more effective at inhibiting TAG secretion from Hep G2 cells compared with the cis-9,trans-11 isomer. Yotsumoto et al. (1999) demonstrated that the trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomer inhibited ApoB and TAG synthesis in Hep G2 cells. The hypotriacylglycerolaemic properties associated with the trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomer were confirmed by Gavino et al. (2000), who demonstrated that a CLA isomeric mix containing trans-10,cis-12 CLA reduced plasma TAG concentrations, but cis-9,trans-11 CLA had no effect in Golden Syrian hamsters. In contrast to our present study, Benito et al. (2001) showed that CLA supplementation had no significant effect on lipid metabolism in human subjects. However, the sample size of that study may not have had sufficient statistical power. A heterogeneous blend of CLA was also used, which may explain the lack of effect. Smedman & Vessby (2001) also showed that CLA supplementation (4·2 g/d for 10 weeks) had no effect on lipid or TAG concentrations, however their cohort showed much greater variability in TAG concentrations compared with our present study.

In the fasted state, VLDL are the principal contributors to plasma TAG concentrations. The 80:20 CLA supplement significantly lowered VLDL-cholesterol concentrations. When the compositional analysis of the VLDL fraction for both CLA groups was pooled, it was demonstrated that decreased VLDL-TAG and -cholesterol concentrations were significant following supplementation. Yotsumoto et al. (1999) demonstrated that both the cis-9,trans-11 and trans-10,cis-12 CLA isomers are equally effective in reducing cholesteryl ester synthesis in Hep G2 cells, however findings from the present study suggest that the cis-9,trans-11 isomer is more potent at reducing cholesteryl ester synthesis in vivo. Clearly, a reduction in VLDL-TAG and -cholesterol concentrations may be attributed to a decrease in the rate of lipid synthesis. It has demonstrated that CLA isomer blends reduce ApoB secretion, ultimately leading to a reduction in the number of VLDL particles (Pariza et al. 2001). Nicolosi et al. (1997) demonstrated that CLA supplementation in hamsters reduced non-HDL-cholesterol concentrations, although whether these decreases were attributed to VLDL or LDL fractions was not specified, while Stangl (2000) demonstrated that CLA supplementation in Sprague Dawley rats reduced VLDL-TAG and -cholesterol concentrations when compared with control group. The findings of our study with regard to lipid metabolism were less profound than those observed in animal studies. This probably reflects differences in CLA blends, increased doses of CLA (relative to body weight) and longer supplementation period (relative to lifespan).

The ultimate goal of the present study was to determine whether CLA was an effective hypotriacylglycerolaemic agent in human subjects. Whilst investigating the molecular basis of the effects of CLA on TAG and VLDL metabolism was beyond the limits of this current study, animal studies provide several molecular mechanisms to explain the hypotriacylglycerolaemic effect of CLA. Moya-Camarena et al. (1999) demonstrated that the cis-9,trans-11 and the trans-10,cis-12 isomers of CLA...
are potent peroxisome proliferator activated receptor (PPAR)-α agonists. PPARα is a key transcription factor that regulates hepatic lipid metabolism. Pharmacological PPARα agonists (e.g. fibrates) improve plasma lipid metabolism by up-regulating PPARα gene expression (Fru- chart et al. 1999). Feeding CLA-enriched diets increases the expression of PPARα-responsive genes in animals (Moya-Camarena & Belury, 1999). Therefore, the TAG-lowering effect of CLA may be partly attributed to the effect of CLA on PPARα. CLA is also a PPARγ ligand. In adipose tissue, PPARγ regulates the expression of the genes that determine adipogenesis, lipid metabolism and insulin sensitivity (Lowell, 1999). Feeding a CLA-rich diet increased adipocyte PPARγ responsive gene expression (ap2) and improved plasma fatty acid metabolism in diabetic Zucker rats (Houseknecht et al. 1998). In the knowledge that pharmacological PPAR agonists improve TAG metabolism, we propose that CLA works in a similar fashion.

Conjugated linoleic acid and cholesterol metabolism

Reverse cholesterol transport is the process whereby cholesterol is returned from peripheral cells to the liver for excretion. CETP is a key enzyme which regulates reverse cholesterol transport, catalysing the reciprocal transfer of TAG and cholesteryl ester between HDL and VLDL. VLDL-TAG is an important determinant of CETP activity (Mann et al. 1991). Based on the antiatherogenic and hypotriacylglycerolaemic effect of CLA in animals, we assessed the effects of CLA supplementation on VLDL-, HDL- and LDL-cholesterol concentrations and CETP metabolism to determine whether CLA affected reverse cholesterol transport. CLA supplementation had no significant effect on CETP activity (Mann et al. 1991). We showed that the expression of CETP activity was not altered by CLA supplementation. CLA supplementation had no significant effect on fasting HDL composition or concentrations. Other studies have also shown that CLA supplementation had no effect on HDL lipid composition. Some studies have shown that linoleic acid reduces the LDL- : HDL-cholesterol ratio (Dupont et al. 1990; Singer et al. 1990; Nydahl et al. 1994). The authors gave careful consideration when choosing an appropriate control fatty acid for the present study. We chose linoleic acid because it represented the non-conjugated form of CLA. Linoleic acid is one of the principle fatty acids in the human diet, therefore we felt that an intake of 3 g/d would have little effect on lipoprotein metabolism. Clearly the linoleic acid had some, albeit a minor, effect on HDL- and LDL-cholesterol levels. The findings of the present study show that although CLA is a potential hypocholesterolaemic agent in animal models this is not the case for normolipidaemic human subjects.

Body weight, glucose and insulin

CLA supplementation had no effect on body weight. Several studies in a variety of rodent models showed that CLA reduced body weight, reduced adiposity and increased lean mass. Body composition was not measured in the present investigation, therefore we cannot conclude whether CLA has an anti-obesity effect. These findings are in agreement with Zambell et al. (2000), who found no changes in body weight or body composition attributed to CLA supplementation in human subjects, however Smideman & Vessby (2001) demonstrated that CLA supplementation (4 g/d), although having no effect on body weight, did significantly reduce body fat. In the present study, CLA supplementation had no effect on fasting glucose and insulin concentrations. Results on the effect of CLA on glucose and insulin metabolism from animal studies are controversial. Houseknecht et al. (1998) showed that a CLA supplementation normalised impaired glucose tolerance and hyperinsulinaemia in Zucker diabetic fa/fa rats. Stangl et al. (1999) showed that a CLA-rich diet (10 g/kg diet) significantly increased (+37 %) insulin concentrations in swine. Tsuboyama-Kascoke et al. (2000) showed that a CLA-rich diet induced insulin resistance and glucose intolerance in C57B16 mice. Our present study demonstrates that in healthy subjects CLA supplementation has neither pro- nor anti-diabetic effects.

Fatty acid composition of total plasma lipids

The mean fatty acid concentration of cis-9,trans-11 isomer of 0.38 g/100 g total plasma lipids at week 0 was comparable with concentrations of this isomer of CLA found in total plasma lipid in human subjects by Jiang et al. (1999). Following CLA supplementation the level of cis-9,trans-11 CLA isomer was significantly (P≤0.001) increased by 90 % in the 50 : 50 CLA group, and by 87 % in the 80 : 20 CLA group. Britton et al. (1992) have shown comparable increases in the incorporation of cis-9,trans-11 isomer of CLA into plasma phospholipids of human subjects as a result of increased consumption of food products rich in CLA for 3 weeks. Huang et al. (1994) demonstrated that the cis-9,trans-11 isomer of CLA increased by 19–27 % as a result of increased intake of dairy products in human subjects. There was a significant reduction in eicosapentaenoic acid (20:5) of total fatty acid composition of plasma lipids in the 80:20...
CLA group, suggesting that increased incorporation of cis-9,trans-11 CLA may be at the expense of n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids. The trans-10,cis-12 isomer was not detected in the week 0 total plasma lipids in the present study, while it was only detected in some of the week 8 samples, which indicates that the trans-10,cis-12 isomer of CLA is not incorporated efficiently into plasma lipids. Sebedio et al. (1997) have demonstrated that the trans-10,cis-12 isomer is metabolised into 20:4 Δ5,8,12,14 and 20:3 Δ8,12,14 via desaturation and elongation pathways. Martin et al. (2000) hypothesised that the trans-10,cis-12 isomer of CLA is more easily oxidised due to its structure allowing it to bypass a number of rate limiting steps in the peroxisomal β-oxidation pathway. Both these findings offer an explanation as to the difficulties in detecting the trans-10,cis-12 isomer of CLA in plasma lipid.

Conclusions
The present study showed that CLA supplementation in human subjects has beneficial effects on some coronary artery disease risk factors. The significant reduction in plasma TAG concentrations was accounted for by reduced VLDL-TAG concentrations. The decrease in plasma TAG concentrations noted in the present study has been estimated to be equivalent to a reduction of 12.5% in coronary artery disease risk according to the findings of Stampfer et al. (1996). Significant reductions in VLDL-cholesterol concentrations were observed in the 80:20 CLA group. HDL-cholesterol concentrations are unaffected by CLA supplementation, while LDL-cholesterol concentrations are reduced non-significantly. Animal studies showed that CLA affected insulin and glucose metabolism, our study showed that this was not the case in human subjects. The present study indicates that CLA has positive clinical effects by conserving the cardio-protective HDL-cholesterol concentrations and reducing the potentially atherogenic VLDL-cholesterol concentrations. Given the low level of CLA in food, CLA supplements or CLA-enriched functional foods would be required to achieve comparable doses. A dose–response study would be required to determine the minimum effective dose of CLA in human subjects.

References
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conjugated linoleic acid promotes fatty streak formation in the C57BL/6 mouse atherosclerosis model. British Journal of Nutrition 81, 251–255.


