Riboflavin deficiency, metabolic rate and brown adipose tissue function in sucking and weanling rats

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(Received 23 May 1988 – Accepted 9 December 1988)

1. The effects of riboflavin deficiency on growth, whole-body oxygen consumption, cytochrome c oxidase (EC 1.9.3.1) activity and GDP-binding capacity of brown adipose tissue were measured in three groups of rats: sucking pups, weanling rats, and dams. Control groups were weight-matched, pair-fed or fed ad lib.

2. Riboflavin deficiency reduced growth rate and increased the activation coefficient of erythrocyte glutathione reductase (NAD(P)H) (EC 1.6.4.2), as predicted. In sucking pups it also reduced whole-body O₂ consumption per unit body-weight, especially after noradrenaline stimulation. In weanling rats, however, it increased O₂ consumption both before and after noradrenaline stimulation.

3. Cytochrome c oxidase (EC 1.9.9.1) activity of brown adipose tissue was not consistently affected by riboflavin deficiency. Binding of [³H]GDP to the mitochondria was increased in the deficient weanling rats.

4. Weanling rats therefore, seemed better able to withstand the effects of severe depletion. Their reduced growth and increased non-shivering thermogenesis helped to counteract the unfavourable ratio of riboflavin:other tissue-building materials. The relevance for thermoregulation in riboflavin-deficient children is discussed.

In view of the widespread occurrence of riboflavin deficiency in children (Bates, 1987), and the important implications for thermoregulation (Duerden & Bates, 1985b), the study of riboflavin deficiency was undertaken in an animal model at different stages of early postnatal development.

An impairment of β-oxidation of fatty acids has consistently been observed in studies on riboflavin-deficient animals. The first step of the β-oxidation cycle is catalysed by a flavin-dependent dehydrogenase, comprising three (alternative) enzymes, classified by their substrate specificities as short-, medium- and long-chain fatty acyl coenzyme A dehydrogenase. The activity of these enzymes in rat-liver homogenates is depressed during riboflavin deficiency (Hoppel et al. 1979; Olpin & Bates, 1982b; Sakurai et al. 1982).

Brown adipose tissue (BAT) is another important site of β-oxidation, and plays an essential role in metabolic heat generation (i.e. non-shivering thermogenesis) in cold-adapted animals, hibernators and the neonate of many species including man (Hull & Hardman, 1970).

Several studies have shown that hepatic mitochondrial oxygen consumption is reduced in severely riboflavin-deficient weanling rats (Hoppel & Tandler, 1975, 1976; Taniguchi & Nakamura, 1976; Hoppel et al. 1979; Olpin & Bates, 1982b; Sakurai et al. 1982). Duerden & Bates (1985b) observed that BAT mitochondrial O₂ consumption is impaired in 15-d-old riboflavin-deficient sucking pups.

In the light of the known biochemical roles of riboflavin, it is clear that flavins play a central role in whole-body energy metabolism. This fact raises some important questions about the functional consequences of riboflavin deficiency on overall metabolic rate, particularly during the neonatal period when fatty acids are the major energy source, and when BAT thermogenesis is essential for the maintenance of thermal equilibrium.

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The aim of the present study was to investigate the functional consequences of dietary riboflavin deficiency for whole-body metabolic rate and the capacity for BAT thermogenesis at different ages and stages of development.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Animals and tissue preparation**

_Dams_. Female DNL (Norwegian) hooded rats, whose mean body-weight was 204 g, had been reared on a standard laboratory chow diet (LAD 1; Labsure, Manea, Cambs) and were housed individually in suspended wire cages at 22° with a 12 h light–12 h dark cycle. They were assigned to the following groups: riboflavin-deficient (RD), and pair-fed (PF) and _ad lib._-fed (AL) controls. A synthetic powdered diet (Table 1, Duerden & Bates, 1985a) was provided for a period of 60 d. The riboflavin-deficient diet contained 0.004 g riboflavin/kg, which was derived entirely from the casein component, described as ‘low in vitamins’ (BDH, Poole, Dorset) (Duerden & Bates, 1985a). PF and AL control animals also received this diet, containing added riboflavin, 0.015 g/kg. The PF animals were individually paired with RD animals during the depletion period before mating and pair-feeding was continued as far as possible during the rapidly increasing intakes associated with pregnancy.

The dams were mated with males which had been given the chow diet, and the presence of a vaginal plug was taken as evidence of successful mating. The dams then continued to receive the purified diets until term. Their litter numbers were each adjusted to eight (by subtraction or addition within diet groups), to ensure equal access to maternal milk, and the pups were reared to day 15 post-partum, receiving only their mother’s milk. Where appropriate (see Table 3, p. 479) they received an intraperitoneal injection of noradrenaline, 800 µg/kg body-weight, 30 min before being killed. The animals were then killed by diethyl ether anaesthesia; blood was removed into heparinized containers by cardiac puncture, and
Riboflavin deficiency and metabolic rate

477

the livers were removed and stored frozen. Where appropriate, the entire interscapular BAT pad was excised, cleaned of adventitious tissues and used immediately for mitochondrial preparations and for cytochrome c oxidase (EC 1.9.3.1) assays (see p. 478).

Weanling rats. Female weanling DNL (Norwegian) hooded rats were housed individually in suspended wire cages and were maintained for 5 weeks on synthetic diets differing from those of the dams (described previously) only in the proportions of casein and sucrose (Table 1). The PF animals were individually paired with riboflavin-deficient animals, and each received the amount of food eaten by them on the previous day. The WM animals were individually weight-matched to RD animals, and received a restricted amount of food which was calculated to maintain their body-weight identical to that of the RD animals (Olpin & Bates, 1982a, b). After approximately 5 weeks, all were killed by diethyl ether anaesthesia, and blood and liver samples were removed and stored at −20° before analysis. Interscapular BAT was removed and used for mitochondrial and cytochrome c oxidase assays where appropriate.

Biochemical measurement of riboflavin status

The packed erythrocyte samples, pooled from four pups in each litter, were diluted with doubly distilled water in order to reduce precipitation of haemoglobin, before freezing at −20°. The activation coefficient (AC; stimulated:basal activity) of the erythrocyte glutathione reductase (NAD(P)H) (EC 1.6.4.2) (EGRAC) was then measured by a modification of the method of Prentice & Bates (1981), using a Roche Cobas centrifugal bioanalyzer. Samples were diluted to a haemoglobin concentration of 2 g/l, centrifuged for 10 min at 2000 g to remove stroma, pre-incubated at 37° for 30 min both with and without FAD (2 μM) and finally transferred to the Cobas samples cups for the enzyme rate determination and estimation of the EGRAC.

Whole-body O₂ consumption. An automated, closed-circuit O₂ consumption apparatus was used as described by Stock (1975). For the sucking pups, four pups from each litter (two males and two females) were measured simultaneously, whereas for weanling rats, individual animals were used. They were placed in a chamber on a wire grid above trays containing soda-lime (to absorb carbon dioxide) and silica gel (to absorb water), and immersed in a water-bath maintained at 33° for the sucking pups and at 29° for the weanling rats.

O₂ consumption was measured by recording the injection of air needed to maintain the chamber at a constant pressure (transducer). After 'basal’ unstimulated O₂ consumption (1 h), the animals received intraperitoneal noradrenaline, 800 μg/kg body-weight, and the 'noradrenaline-stimulated’ respiration rate was determined.

BAT mitochondrial function

Isolation of mitochondria. The method was derived from Cannon & Lindberg (1979). The rats were treated with noradrenaline (800 μg/kg body-weight, intraperitoneally) 30 min before the removal of BAT. All the interscapular BAT was excised, white fat, muscle and connective tissues were removed, and the BAT was homogenized in a Potter-Elvehjem homogenizer with loose-fitting pestle, with 10 ml ice-cold buffer, pH 7·2 at 0–4°C. The buffer contained (mol/l): sucrose 0·25, N-2-hydroxyethyl piperazine-N-2-ethane sulphonic acid 1 × 10⁻³, EDTA 2 × 10⁻³. The homogenate was diluted with buffer to 15 ml, and 1 ml was removed for the determination of total cytochrome c oxidase activity (see p. 478) and protein concentration (Bensadoun & Weinstein, 1976). The remaining homogenate was centrifuged at 12000 g for 15 min to sediment the mitochondria, nuclei and cell debris. This pellet was resuspended in buffer and centrifuged at 700 g to remove nuclei and debris. The supernatant fraction containing the mitochondria
was filtered through nylon bolting (30 μm mesh), and the mitochondria were washed twice more with buffer before resuspension at a protein concentration of about 4 mg/ml.

[8-3H]GDP-binding assay. The method used was that of Goodbody & Trayhurn (1981) modified from Nicholls (1976). The mitochondria were suspended at 0.4 mg/ml in 1.0 ml buffer, pH 7.1, containing (mol/l): sucrose 0.1, choline chloride 1 × 10⁻², EDTA 1 × 10⁻³, N-Tris(hydroxymethyl)methyl-2-amino-ethane-sulphonic acid 2 × 10⁻². To the mitochondrial suspension were added [U-³¹C]sucrose (Amersham International plc, Amersham, Bucks; 0.1 μCi/ml), and [8-³H]GDP (Amersham International; 10⁻⁵ M, 1:25 μCi/ml). After 5 min incubation at 25°, the mitochondria were sedimented by centrifugation (3 min at 25000 g in an MSE Micro-Centaur centrifuge) and were dissolved in 0.1 ml sodium hydroxide (0.75 mol/l) at 55° before addition of scintillant (Optiphase Safe; LKB). Double-label scintillation counting was used to measure the radioactivity present in both ³H and ¹⁴C separately, and the quantity of bound GDP was calculated after correction for the extramitochondrial fluid in the pellet, which was estimated from the [¹⁴C]sucrose content.

Cytochrome c oxidase assay. Cytochrome c oxidase activity was measured by a modification of Yonetani & Ray (1965). The homogenate was mixed with 0.01 vol. Lubrol (Sigma), a non-ionic detergent. Reduced ferrocytochrome c (Sigma) was prepared at 50 μmol/l, in phosphate buffer (0.01 mol/l, pH 7.0). Its rate of oxidation was measured at 550 nm in the Cobas analyzer, using 10 μl BAT homogenate and 310 μl reagent. Enzyme activities from each group of four pups and from individual tissue samples from weanling rats and dams were calculated from the extinction coefficient of ferricytochrome c: 0.92 litres/mmol per cm.

Statistical analysis
Student’s t test was used for intergroup comparisons, since normal distributions were observed.

RESULTS

Body-weight, relative organ weights and EGRAC (Table 2)

Dams and sucking pups. The body-weights of RD dams were significantly less than those of their PF (P < 0.05) and AL (P < 0.001) controls. The liver:body-weight ratio for RD dams was significantly elevated only in comparison with PF controls, and BAT:body-weight ratio was not significantly different between the groups. As predicted, EGRAC of the RD dams was significantly greater than that of either the PF or AL controls (P < 0.001).

Similar results were obtained for the RD sucking pups; body-weight was significantly less than those of the PF or AL controls (P < 0.002), and liver:body-weight ratio was significantly higher than those of PF (P < 0.01) or AL (P < 0.001) controls. EGRAC of RD sucking pups was significantly higher than those of PF or AD controls (P < 0.001).

Weanling rats. The body-weights of RD weanling rats were significantly lower than those of PF (P < 0.01) or AL (P < 0.001) controls. Their liver:body-weight ratio was significantly higher than those of PF (P < 0.001) and AL (P < 0.01) controls, and their BAT:body-weight ratio was higher than that of PF controls (P < 0.01).

The EGRAC of RD animals was significantly higher than those of PF (P < 0.01) and AL (P < 0.02) controls.

O₂ consumption and the effect of noradrenaline on the sucking pups and weanling rats (Table 3)

At 10 d after birth the initial O₂ consumption was not significantly different between RD and control groups. The noradrenaline-stimulated response was significantly lower for the
Riboflavin deficiency and metabolic rate

Table 2. Body-weights, organ:body-weight ratios and activation coefficient of erythrocyte glutathione reductase (EC 1.6.4.2) (EGRAC) of dams, sucking pups and weanling rats which were riboflavin-deficient, or pair-fed or ad lib.-fed controls†

(Mean values with their standard errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group...</th>
<th>Riboflavin-deficient</th>
<th>Pair-fed controls</th>
<th>Ad lib.-fed controls</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams and sucking pups‡</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body-wt (g):</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>248**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pups</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>105.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver:body-wt:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.0035</td>
<td>0.052*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pups</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.0036</td>
<td>0.033***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAT:body-wt (× 10³):</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Dams</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pups</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGRAC:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams</td>
<td>1.708</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.26***</td>
</tr>
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<td>Pups</td>
<td>1.769</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>1.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weanling rats§</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Body-wt (g):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>112**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pups</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.048***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver:body-wt:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pups</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1.37***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean values were significantly different between either control group and the riboflavin-deficient group (Student's t test): * P < 0.05, ** P < 0.01, *** P < 0.002.
† At the time of death; for details of diets and procedures, see Table 1 and p. 476.
‡ Four dams and eight sets of pups (four pups in each set) in each experimental group.
§ Five rats in the riboflavin-deficient and six rats in each of the pair-fed and ad lib.-fed control groups.

Table 3. Whole-body oxygen consumption (ml/min per kg body-weight) of sucking pups and weanling rats which were riboflavin-deficient, or weight-matched, pair-fed or ad lib.-fed controls†

(Mean values with their standard errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group...</th>
<th>Riboflavin-deficient</th>
<th>Weight-matched controls</th>
<th>Pair-fed controls</th>
<th>Ad lib.-fed controls</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sucking pups‡</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-d-old Basal§</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulated¶</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-d-old Basal§</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulated¶</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weanling rats§</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basal§</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulated¶</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basal§</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>29.8***</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean values were significantly different between either control group and the riboflavin-deficient group (Student's t test): ** P < 0.01, *** P < 0.001.
† For details of diets and procedures, see Table 1 and p. 476.
‡ Four sets, with four pups in each group.
§ Initial resting metabolic rate.
¶ Increased metabolic rate after a dose of noradrenaline (800 µg/kg intraperitonally).
* Eight animals in each group.
Table 4. [\(^3\)H]GDP binding and cytochrome c oxidase (EC 1.9.3.1) in brown adipose tissue of dams, suckling pups and weanling rats which were riboflavin-deficient, or weight-matched, pair-fed or ad lib.-fed controls

(Mean values with their standard errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Riboflavin-deficient</th>
<th>Weight-matched controls</th>
<th>Pair-fed controls</th>
<th>Ad lib.-fed controls</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean  SE (n)</td>
<td>Mean  SE (n)</td>
<td>Mean  SE (n)</td>
<td>Mean  SE (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams and sucking pups‡</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[(^3)H]GDP bound$</td>
<td>Dams 196 28 (4)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>381  85 (4)</td>
<td>290  33 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pups  684 140 (4 x 4)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>1637*** 214 (4 x 4)</td>
<td>839  180 (4 x 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cytochrome c oxidase$</td>
<td>Dams 25 8.5 (4)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>13  2 (4)</td>
<td>20  4.5 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pups  33 6 (4 x 4)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>23  2 (4 x 4)</td>
<td>33  7 (4 x 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weanling rats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[(^3)H]GDP bound$</td>
<td>Dams 745 63 (5)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>425** 48 (5)</td>
<td>374*** 47 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pups  20 1.0 (5)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>19  0.9 (5)</td>
<td>29*** 0.8 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cytochrome c oxidase</td>
<td>Dams 604 44 (7)</td>
<td>445* 68 (7)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pups  12 0.8 (7)</td>
<td>11 0.8 (7)</td>
<td>— —</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean values were significantly different between the control groups and the riboflavin-deficient group (Student's t test): * \(P < 0.05\), ** \(P < 0.01\), *** \(P < 0.001\).

† For details of diets and procedures, see Table 1 and p. 476.
‡ Dams and suckling pups: four dams and four sets of four 15-d-old sucking pups, in each group.
§ pmol GDP bound/mg mitochondrial protein.
|| mol cytochrome c oxidized/min by the entire interscapular brown adipose tissue from each animal.
Riboflavin deficiency and metabolic rate

RD group by 40% compared with the PF controls \((P < 0.001)\) and by 38% compared with the AL \((P < 0.001)\) controls. The rise in metabolic rate in response to noradrenaline stimulation was 21% for RD, 108% for PF and 97% for AL.

By 15 d after birth, the differences between the RD and control groups had increased. The initial metabolic rate for the RD group was significantly lower by 19% \((P < 0.01)\) in comparison with PF and by 16% \((P < 0.01)\) in comparison with AL controls. The noradrenaline-stimulated response was markedly lower by 52% in comparison with PF \((P < 0.001)\) and by 46% in comparison with AL \((P < 0.001)\) controls.

Weanling deficient rats, in contrast, had significantly higher \(O_2\) consumptions than their respective controls; by 24–36% \((P < 0.001)\) before noradrenaline stimulation, and by 18–25% \((P < 0.01)\) after noradrenaline.

**BAT \(^{3}H\)GDP binding and cytochrome c oxidase activity (Table 4)**

*Sucking pups.* Reduced \(^{3}H\)GDP binding was observed for RD pups in comparison with the control groups, although this was significant \((P < 0.01)\) only in comparison with PF controls. Total cytochrome c oxidase activity was not significantly different between the groups.

For the dams, a significant difference was not observed between the groups, either for \(^{3}H\)GDP binding or for total cytochrome c oxidase activity, although there was a consistent trend towards reduced binding in the RD dams.

*Weaning rats.* \(^{3}H\)GDP binding for RD weanlings was markedly elevated, by 36% \((P < 0.05)\) in comparison with WM, by 75% \((P < 0.01)\) in comparison with PF, and by 99% \((P < 0.001)\) in comparison with AL controls. Total cytochrome c oxidase activity was similar in RD, WM and PF, although that of RD was significantly less \((P < 0.001)\) than that in the AL controls. The specific activity (\(\mu\)mol cytochrome c oxidized/min per mg protein) was similar between all groups, with means of 0.65 (SE 0.16) for RD, 0.48 (SE 0.049) for PF and 0.56 (SE 0.049) for AL controls.

**DISCUSSION**

Noradrenaline is the normal physiological activator of BAT thermogenesis, and this function can be assessed in vivo from the increase in whole-body metabolic rate (under conditions of thermoneutrality) in response to maximal stimulation with noradrenaline (Moore & Underwood, 1963). The physiological consequences of riboflavin deficiency in the sucking pups are clearly demonstrated by the observation of a marked reduction in the noradrenaline-stimulated metabolic rate for RD animals compared with controls, which confirms previous observations (Duerden & Bates, 1985). RD sucking pups thus apparently have an impaired capacity for thermogenesis.

The effect of riboflavin deficiency during the weaning period was quite different because an elevated metabolic rate (both initial and noradrenaline-stimulated) was observed. Furthermore, the percentage increase in metabolic rate in response to noradrenaline was comparable to that of the control groups, whereas the percentage increase in deficient sucking pups was markedly lower than that in the controls.

The increase in initial metabolic rate seen in RD weanling rats contrasts with the observations of Nolte et al. (1972). Here, an RD group exhibited a markedly reduced metabolic rate, as demonstrated by a decreased \(O_2\) consumption, which was attributed to a reduction in thyroid hormone status. In the present authors' experience, however, the reduction in thyroid hormone concentration in RD animals is due to inanition and not to riboflavin deficiency per se (Patterson, 1987) and, therefore, cannot explain the specific metabolic rate changes caused by riboflavin deficiency. In Nolte's study (Nolte et al. 1972)
the rats were much older and heavier at the outset, and were fed on a riboflavin-deficient diet for 96 d, the controls being fed on a commercial rat diet ad lib.

The changes seen in the present study may help provide an explanation for one of the features of riboflavin deficiency in weanling rats: their inefficient utilization of energy for growth, and hence markedly reduced weight gain per unit of food consumed (Olpin & Bates, 1982a; Duerden & Bates, 1985a). For sucking pups, it is possible that the reduced metabolic rate may be accompanied by a reduced energy intake, with no net change in weight gain.

The GDP-binding assay has been widely used as a measure of the thermogenic capacity of BAT (Goodbody & Trayhurn, 1981; Sundin et al. 1981) and was used in the present study, together with cytochrome c oxidase, as an index of total thermogenic activity. For the weanling rats, the enhanced O₂ consumption of the RD group was accompanied by a reduction in BAT mitochondrial GDP binding. For the sucking pups, the GDP-binding result was less consistent, being significantly lower in the RD than in the PF controls, but not significantly different from the ad lib.-fed controls. In an earlier study (Duerden & Bates, 1985b), GDP binding was unaffected by riboflavin deficiency in sucking pups, although their BAT mitochondrial respiration, after treatment with noradrenaline, was depressed.

In the present study, the markedly elevated GDP binding observed for RD weanlings suggests an increase in the activity of the proton conductance pathway, and hence in the thermogenic capacity of BAT. The increased total cytochrome c oxidase activity observed in AL weanlings showed that their total thermogenic capacity was greater. However, this presumably was a reflection of their significantly greater BAT mass, in comparison with the RD and PF groups, because the cytochrome c oxidase specific activity was similar between all the groups.

In conclusion, it is clear that different responses to riboflavin deficiency arise during the sucking and weanling periods respectively. The intake of fat from milk during sucking is, of course, much higher than that during the weanling period, and this probably constitutes a further factor in the sequence of changes between sucking and weaning, which determines the apparent change in sensitivity to riboflavin deficiency with age. Thus, the stage of development at which deficiency is induced is an extremely important variable, and changes in the capacity for BAT thermogenesis appear to determine how the animal will cope with this nutritional insult.

Riboflavin deficiency is one of the commonest water-soluble vitamin deficiencies of human societies in developing countries, where diets lack meat, fish and dairy products. Moreover, the newborn and young babies can exhibit marked biochemical riboflavin deficiency (Bates et al. 1982, 1984). Failure to achieve the genetically programmed growth potential in these societies can have many causes, of which chronic riboflavin deficiency may be one. In addition, thermoregulatory performance is stressed, especially during the cooler seasons, and by traditional practices such as that of washing babies in cold water, including the newborn. Clearly, therefore, a better understanding of the implications of riboflavin deficiency for energy expenditure and thermoregulation is highly relevant to the developmental biology of many human societies. It thus seems that the prevention of riboflavin deficiency during the neonatal period warrants renewed concern.

B.E.P. was supported by a Medical Research Council Studentship.

REFERENCES

Riboflavin deficiency and metabolic rate


Printed in Great Britain