High-viscosity carboxymethylcellulose reduces carbachol-stimulated intestinal chloride secretion in weaned piglets fed a diet based on skimmed milk powder and maltodextrin

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High-viscosity carboxymethylcellulose (CMC) promotes gastrointestinal disorders, tissue alterations and bacterial overgrowth in pigs. The impact of CMC on intestinal absorptive and secretory physiology is not known. We hypothesised that CMC consumption alters intestinal Na-dependent glucose absorption and stimulates electrogenic chloride secretion. For testing this hypothesis, twenty-four piglets were weaned at 21 d of age and pair-fed for 13 d a starter diet based on skimmed milk powder and maltodextrin containing cellulose (control) or CMC. Body weight and faecal total aerobic and coliform counts were measured kinetically. At slaughter, digesta were weighed and characterised for viscosity and pH. Gastro-intestinal tissues were weighed and sampled for physiology in Ussing chambers, morphometry and enzymology. Glucose absorption tended to be higher (P=0.08) and carbachol-stimulated chloride secretion was lower (P=0.01) with CMC in the small intestine, without changes in the colon. Aerobes were transiently higher at day 7 (P<0.05) but coliform counts remained unchanged (P=0.78) and β-haemolitic *Escherichia coli* were virtually absent. Stomach and small-intestinal segments were heavier, and viscosity higher with CMC (0.001 < P<0.05). The pH in the stomach was higher, and in the caecum and proximal colon lower with CMC (0.001 < P<0.05). Jejunal villus area was slightly reduced with CMC (P<0.05) without effects on enzyme activities (P>0.10). In conclusion, CMC supplementation had pro-absorptive effects on the small intestine, possibly due to the absence of pathogenic *E. coli* in the present study.

**Pigs: Carboxymethylcellulose: Intestinal physiology: Bacteria**

Post-weaning colibacillosis is an important infectious disease occurring in pigs 3–10 d after weaning (Hampson, 1994). It involves primarily β-haemolytic enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* strains that adhere to the proximal intestinal villous enterocytes and release enterotoxins that stimulate hydro-mineral secretion leading to diarrhoea (Francis, 2002). Disease expression is influenced by dietary factors. A diet based on cooked rice and animal protein sources is protective (McDonald *et al.* 1999), while pearl barley and wheat to a lesser extent exacerbate diarrhoea and the faecal excretion of *E. coli* (Hopwood *et al.*, 2002, 2004; Montagne *et al.* 2004). These ingredients are rich in soluble viscous NSP responsible for the increase in digesta viscosity and appearance of colibacillosis. Diet digestibility, nutrient absorption and growth rate are usually reduced with such diets (Hopwood *et al.*, 2002, 2004; Montagne *et al.* 2004).

Soluble non-digestible NSP including guar gum, high-methylated citrus pectin and carboxymethylcellulose (CMC) have been used as model compounds to increase viscosity and to explore its influence on gastrointestinal function in rats (Blackburn & Johnson, 1981; Flourie *et al.* 1997, 1998; Langhout *et al.* 1999, 2000) and pigs (McDonald *et al.* 1999, 2001; Montagne *et al.* 2004). The bulk of digesta was usually increased along the gut while digestion and nutrient absorption were reduced. Alterations in small-intestinal architecture were also noted. In birds, it was clearly demonstrated that the intestinal microflora mediated the magnitude of disorders, since germ-free chicks displayed neither reduced digestibility nor intestinal tissue alterations (Langhout *et al.* 2000). From these data it is usually considered that NSP reduce the absorption of glucose and water from the small intestine, favouring diarrhoea. However, previous reports showed that all these compounds do not behave similarly on gut physiology. Pectin and other plant gums inhibit solute and water absorption (Blackburn & Johnson, 1981; Flourie *et al.* 1984; Rainbird *et al.* 1984), while medium-viscosity CMC stimulates it in the rat jejunum (Go *et al.* 1994). The actual effects of polysaccharide compounds on intestinal physiology appear to depend on their chemical structure and rheological properties (Go *et al.* 1994; Wapnir *et al.* 1997). Since these mechanisms have not been studied in pigs fed a diet supplemented with CMC, we designed the present experiment. Based on the work by McDonald *et al.* (2001) in weaned pigs, we hypothesised that the addition of high-viscosity CMC decreases Na-dependent glucose absorption and possibly stimulates chloride secretion in the small intestine.

**Abbreviations:** CFU, colony-forming units; CMC, carboxymethylcellulose; 5-HT, serotonin; *I*<sub>s</sub>, short-circuit current.

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The CMC diet had a viscosity of 33.7 (SEM 0.5) mPa • s. In the CMC diet, high-viscosity CMC as used by McDonald later). In the CMC diet, high-viscosity CMC as used by McDonald et al. (2001) was substituted for cellulose (40 g/kg). The CMC diet had a viscosity of 33.7 (SEM 0.5) mPa • s (n 4). The two diets were formulated to meet weaner pig requirements for growth (Sève, 1994) and were similar in their length) for villus and crypt morphometry and mucosal enzyme activities. Briefly, the specimens for morphometry (0.5 × 0.5 cm) were excised, rinsed in physiological saline and fixed in phosphate-buffered formalin (10%; pH 7-6) overnight and then rinsed with, and transferred to, ethanol–water (3:1, v/v) until analysis (Salgado et al. 2001). The samples for enzymology determination were rinsed with saline, scraped with a glass slide at +4°C and stored at −80°C until analysis (Salgado et al. 2001).

Counts of total aerobes, coliforms and β-haemolytic Escherichia coli in the faeces

Freshly collected faecal samples (1 g) were immediately placed in Ringer solution, homogenised, and analysed within 3 to 4 h. Serial ten-fold dilutions of the homogenates were prepared and 0.1 ml of 10^6 to 10^8 dilutions were spread on two agar plates. The first one was Columbia blood agar and served for the determination of total aerobes while the second was MacConkey agar, a specific medium for counting total coliforms (Canibe & Jensen, 2003). Colonies were counted after 48 and 24 h, respectively, of incubation at 37°C under aerobic conditions. β-Haemolytic E. coli colonies were identified after 24 h on blood agar plates, based on their morphology. Data are expressed as log colony-forming units (CFU)/g faeces.

pH and viscosity measurements

Digested pH was determined immediately after slaughter on fresh digesta using a pH meter (704 model; Metrom ltd, Herisau, Switzerland). Viscosity measurements were carried out on diet in the form of mash and diluted digesta at a shear rate of 60/s (Piel et al. 2005), as recommended by McDonald et al. (2001).

Measurements of electrical parameters of the small-intestinal mucosa

Electrophysiological properties of the small-intestinal mucosa were measured in twelve Ussing chambers as described elsewhere (Boudry et al. 2004). Each set of measurements included samples from a given experimental pair of piglets, which were slaughtered at a 15 min interval. Three pieces per intestinal site per piglet were assigned randomly to chambers. The transepithelial potential difference of the intestinal tissue was clamped at 0 mV by an external current, this being equal to the short-circuit current (Isc). The transepithelial resistance (R) was calculated from Ohm’s law from current deflections in response to 3 mV transepithelial voltage pulses of 300 ms every 10 s (Boudry et al. 2004). The bathing medium in the Ussing chambers was Ringer’s bicarbonate solution containing 16 mm-D-glucose on the serosal side or 16 mm-mannitol on the mucosal side for tissues from the small intestine and 16 mm-D-glucose on both sides

Animals, experimental design and sample collection

The experiment was conducted under the guidelines of the French Ministry of Agriculture for animal research. Twenty-four piglets (Pietrain × (Landrace × Large-White)) from the experimental herd of INRA Saint-Gilles with a mean body weight of 6.03 (SEM 0.04) kg were weaned at age 21 d. At weaning (day 0), twenty-four piglets in two rounds were associated by pairs within litters, with one animal for each diet, on the basis of weaning body weight and litter origin. They were placed into individual cages (0.6 × 0.8 m) and were pair-fed until the end of the experiment period. More precisely, the first piglet offered ad libitum access to the food in a given pair was the one having consumed the least during the previous meal, irrespective of the treatment group assigned. The consistency of faeces was visually determined daily up to day 13 after the start of the experiment. It was scored from 1 to 3, 1 corresponding to normal, 2 to soft and 3 to liquid faeces. The faeces were also collected at days 0, 5, 7 and 12 for counting total aerobes and coliforms.

At the end of the experimental period, 2 h after the last meal, the piglets were anaesthetised by electronarcosis, and killed by exsanguination. The gastrointestinal tract was removed and the stomach, small intestine, caecum and colon were isolated by double ligation. Then, the small intestine and colon were dissected and each segment divided into two parts equal in length. Each gastrointestinal segment was weighed full and empty, digesta collected totally and pH measured. Approximately 10 g digesta per segment were collected for viscosity measurements.

Tissues were sampled in the middle of the first half of the small intestine and colon for physiology measurements in Ussing chambers (Boudry et al. 2004). Each sample was rinsed with saline (9 g NaCl/l) before treatment. Tissue samples were also collected from the middle of the first and second half of the small intestine (that is, at 25 and 75% of its length) for villus and crypt morphometry and mucosal enzyme activities. Briefly, the specimen for morphometry (0.5 × 0.5 cm) were excised, rinsed in physiological saline and fixed in phosphate-buffered formalin (10%; pH 7-6) overnight and then rinsed with, and transferred to, ethanol–water (3:1, v/v) until analysis (Salgado et al. 2001). The samples for enzymology determination were rinsed with saline, scraped with a glass slide at +4°C and stored at −80°C until analysis (Salgado et al. 2001).
for tissues from the proximal colon. The medium was continuously bubbled with carbogen (5% CO₂:95% O₂) and maintained at 38°C. Tissues were left to equilibrate for 20 min before basal Isc and R were evaluated as the mean values from 20 to 30 min. Glucose absorption by small-intestinal tissues was assessed through the increase in Isc (ΔIsc) after mucosal addition of 16 mM-D-glucose osmotically balanced on the serosal side by 16 mM-mannitol. Secretagogue-induced chloride secretion was studied by the addition of 10⁻³ M-carbachol, 10⁻⁴ M-serotonin (5-HT), or 10⁻⁴ M-histamine in the serosal compartment of separate chambers, followed 10 min later by 2.2 × 10⁻³ M-theophylline in both sides of each chamber. Mean responses for each set of three measurements for each tissue type were calculated for theophylline.

**Morphology and enzyme activities of the small-intestinal mucosa**

Samples of small intestine were microdissected for villi and crypts and measured according to the technique of Goodlad et al. (1991). This was carried out on ten to fifteen villi and crypts per sample using the equipment described previously (Piel et al. 2005). The obtained values were averaged per villi and crypts for each tissue sample.

The activities of maltase (EC 3.2.1.20), aminopeptidase A (EC 3.4.11.7), dipeptidylpeptidase IV (EC 3.4.14.5) and alkaline phosphatase (EC 3.1.3.1) were determined and specific activities calculated as detailed previously (Salgado et al. 2001).

**Statistical analysis**

The variance homogeneity of the data was assessed by F test using Statview (version 4.55; Abacus Concepts Inc., Berkeley, CA, USA). Data were analysed using the general linear models procedure of the Statistical Analysis System (SAS, 1989). The effect of replication was tested using the residual variation between pairs as the error. The effect of the diet was tested against residual variations within pairs as the error term. Student’s t test was used for comparisons of least square means. Data from variables measured over time were analysed for time, diet and time × diet interaction using the REPEATED statement within the general linear models procedure of SAS. Values are presented as least square means and SEM. Differences were declared significant at P<0.05.

**Results**

**Technical results**

As already reported (Piel et al. 2005), a pair of piglets had to be removed from the study because one animal consumed abnormally low amounts of mash. Pair-feeding led to essentially similar slaughter body weights (8.67 (SEM 0.14) and 8.88 (SEM 0.14) kg; P=0.30) and body-weight gains (2.70 (SEM 0.14) and 2.88 (SEM 0.14) kg; P=0.38) among piglets fed the control and CMC diets, respectively. The faecal scores were significantly higher in the CMC than in the control group from day 6 to day 13 (P<0.0001) (Fig. 1).

**Counts of coliforms, aerobes and β-haemolytic Escherichia coli in the faeces**

Coliform counts (log CFU/g) in the faeces of piglets did not vary significantly over time post-weaning and between treatments (8.17 (SEM 0.13) and 8.12 (SEM 0.12) log CFU/g, for control and CMC-fed piglets, respectively; P=0.78). A significant time × treatment interaction was observed for aerobe counts (P=0.03), showing transiently higher values in the CMC group at day 7 (P=0.05) (Fig. 2). The coliform/aerobe count ratio was not influenced by the diet (P=0.36). Only one faecal sample from a CMC pig was found to harbour β-haemolytic E. coli in the present study.

**Weight and characteristics of gut segments and digesta at slaughter**

The weight of the full gastrointestinal segments was lower for the stomach and higher for the second half and whole small
intestine of the CMC piglets (P<0.05), with no significant effects of treatments for the first half of the small intestine and large intestine (P=0.92 and P=0.47, respectively) (Table 1). The amount of mash consumed during the last meal before slaughter was similar in both treatment groups (P=0.19). However, 2 h later, the weight of fresh digesta in the stomach was slightly (−8%) but significantly lower in the CMC group as compared with the control (P=0.02). Conversely, this amount of contents was higher in the small intestine of CMC piglets (P=0.01). This tended to be accounted for by the amount of digesta present in the second half of the small intestine (73 (SEM 12) and 108 (SEM 13) g; P=0.08). No significant differences between diets were observed for large-intestinal digesta weights (P=0.53).

As expected from the differences observed between diets, the viscosity of digesta in the stomach, the first and second halves of the small intestine and in the caecum were 10 (P=0.001), 17 (P=0.01), 13 (P=0.01) and 2.6 (P=0.03) times higher in the CMC piglets than in the controls (Table 2). The viscosity of digesta in the colon was not measurable after dilution as applied to the digesta of the other gastrointestinal segments.

The pH of digesta was higher in the stomach (P=0.03) and lower in the caecum (P=0.001) and colon (P=0.001) of the piglets fed the CMC diet (Fig. 3). No significant differences were observed between treatments in the first and second half of the small intestine and in the second half of the colon for digesta pH (P=0.84, P=0.26 and P=0.49, respectively).

**Absorptive and secretory properties of the intestinal mucosa**

The mucosa of the first half of the small intestine displayed a basal Isc and a transepithelial resistance that were not significantly different between diet treatments (P=0.22 and P=0.13, respectively) (Table 3). However, the increase in Isc in response to glucose tended to be higher in the piglets fed CMC than in the controls (P=0.08). The change in Isc to carbachol stimulation was 60% lower in the CMC piglets (P<0.001). By contrast, mucosal responses to 5-HT, histamine and theophylline did not significantly differ between treatments (P=0.73, P=0.87 and P=0.54, respectively). No significant differences between diets were observed in these physiology parameters for the colonic mucosa (P=0.23 to P=0.97).

**Morphometry and enzyme activities of the small-intestinal mucosa**

There was no significant difference between treatments in intestinal length and width of villi and crypts (P=0.15 to P=0.76), except villus area in the first half of the small intestine that was lower with CMC as compared with the control (102 546 (SEM 4500) and 87 705 (SEM 4500) μm²; P=0.04). There was no significant difference between treatments in any of the intestinal specific enzyme activities studied (P=0.25 to P=0.94).

**Discussion**

**Carboxymethylcellulose and intestinal absorptive and secretory physiology**

The major result of the present study is that high-viscosity CMC tended to increase Na-dependent glucose absorption and drastically decreased carbachol-induced chloride secretion in the jejunum of pigs, without any significant changes at the level of the proximal colon. Our Ussing chamber data are in agreement with previously published values (Boudry et al. 2004). Thus, the small intestine of our piglets was in a rather pro-absorptive state for ions and water, with no influence of CMC on the large intestine. Faecal scores were clearly increased after 5 d of CMC consumption and remained high thereafter, in agreement with increased ileal water content in these piglets (Piel et al. 2005). Faeces inconsistency might have reflected the water-holding and gelling capacities of CMC, which were maintained in the faeces since CMC is not fermented (Wyatt et al. 1988; McDonald et al. 2001). Increased water consumption often seen with CMC

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**Table 1.** Influence of the diet on the weight of the full segments and of fresh digesta (g) in the gastrointestinal tract of piglets fed a control diet or a diet containing carboxymethylcellulose (CMC)

(Least square means with their standard errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diet...</th>
<th>Control Mean</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>CMC Mean</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>Statistical significance of a diet effect: P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weight of the full segments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, first half</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, second half</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, total</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large intestine</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight of mash consumed and of fresh digesta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mash consumed</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, first half</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, second half</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large intestine</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For details of diets and procedures, see p. 489.
supplementation (Smits et al. 1997; Langhout et al. 1999, 2000) might have also contributed to the water retained by CMC in the digesta and to the increased faecal water losses.

Improved Na-dependent glucose absorption in the present study is in agreement with the observation that medium-viscosity CMC increased absorption of Na and water in the perfused jejunum of both control rats and those with induced osmotic diarrhoea (Go et al. 1994). These authors considered that the rise in viscosity associated with the addition of CMC may have increased surface contact of osmotically active solutes, resulting in greater net water absorption. They also suggested the possibility that CMC causes local changes of the unstirred layer, following accumulation by physical entrapment or chemical link of CMC to the intestinal glycocalyx. The molecular mechanisms for increased Na–glucose absorption as observed in the present study are not known. They did not seem to be related to villus surface area, which was reduced with CMC. Other explanations include microvillus elongation as observed following fasting in rats (Waheed & Gupta, 1997), increased density of the Na–glucose co-transporter SGLT1 or increased absorption via other routes (Ferraris, 2001). Finally, decreased jejunal absorption of glucose and water has been reported with guar gum (Blackburn & Johnson, 1981; Rainbird et al. 1984). Differences in physiological effects between NSP, including CMC, might have come from differences in structural and rheological properties (Go et al. 1994; Wapnir et al. 1997).

The predominant electrolyte driving fluid secretion is chloride, although secretion of bicarbonate and K occurs along the intestine (Barrett & Keely, 2000). Chloride secretion augments in response to increases in cyclic nucleotides (for example, cyclic AMP) or cytosolic Ca through two types of channels, cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator and Ca$^{2+}$-activated chloride channel, respectively. These channels can be stimulated by various substances including neurotransmitters (acetylcholine, carbachol), immune (for example, histamine) and paracrine (for example, 5-HT) mediators, and exogenous agents such as bacteria and bacterial toxins. In the present study, only the carbachol-induced chloride secretion of the jejunum was reduced with the CMC diet. Carbachol is a cholinergetic muscarinic agonist acting through the increase of intracellular Ca ion concentration (Dharmathaphorn & Pandol, 1986). The responses to 5-HT and histamine, two other mediators of the intracellular Ca pathway (Barrett & Keely, 2000), remained unchanged. Thus, CMC may have acted at the level of the muscarinic receptor. The cyclic AMP-dependent chloride secretion was apparently not involved in the observed changes, as revealed by the lack of differences between treatments in response to the agonist theophylline. The cyclic AMP-dependent cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator chloride channel is considered as the major pathway for chloride movement (Barrett & Keely, 2000). Therefore, it is possible that the reduced jejunal chloride secretory capacity via the intracellular Ca route in presence of CMC as observed in the present study would not be sufficient to counter electrogenic chloride secretion stimulated by E. coli enterotoxins via the cyclic AMP-dependent pathway in post-weaning colibacillosis.

### Table 2. Influence of the diet on the viscosity (mPa.s) of gut digesta of piglets fed a control diet or a diet containing carboxymethylcellulose (CMC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digesta pH</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>CMC</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>Statistical significance of a diet effect: P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, first half</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine, second half</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caecum</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For details of diets and procedures, see p. 489.

**Fig. 3.** Influence of the diet on digesta pH at slaughter in piglets fed a control diet (○) or a diet containing carboxymethylcellulose (●) for 13 d. Values are least square means, with their standard errors represented by vertical bars. Sto, stomach; SI 1, first half of the small intestine; SI 2, second half of the small intestine; Caec, caecum; Co 1, first half of the colon; Co 2, second half of the colon.*Digesta pH was significantly higher in the stomach of the CMC pigs (P=0.03). **Digesta pH was significantly higher in the caecum and proximal colon of the control pigs (P=0.001).

**Carboxymethylcellulose and the intestinal microflora**

Many data in rats and birds support the view that the intestinal microflora, especially E. coli, mediates the magnitude of the adverse effects of high-viscosity NSP (Wyatt et al. 1988; Smits et al. 1997, 1998; Langhout et al. 1999). In pigs, high-viscosity CMC favours the outgrowth of intestinal enteropathogenic β-haemolytic E. coli (McDonald et al. 2001; Hopwood et al. 2002). In the present study, total aero-bes in the faeces only transiently increased with CMC while E. coli counts did not vary significantly and β-haemolytic E. coli were virtually absent. Haemolytic E. coli fimbriae...
achieve this. 

Table 3. Influence of the diet on the electrophysiological parameters measured in Ussing chambers for the first half of the small intestine of piglets fed a control diet or a diet containing carboxymethylcellulose (CMC) (Least square means with their standard errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diet...</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>CMC</th>
<th>Statistical significance of a diet effect: ( P )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SEM</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( I_{sc} ) (( \mu A/cm^2 ))</td>
<td>56 17</td>
<td>68 17</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transepithelial resistance (( \Omega \times cm^2 ))</td>
<td>49 6</td>
<td>35 6</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta I_{sc} ) (( \mu A/cm^2 ))</td>
<td>158 33</td>
<td>256 33</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta I_{sc} ) carbachol (( \mu A/cm^2 ))</td>
<td>81 9</td>
<td>32 9</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta I_{sc} ) 5-HT (( \mu A/cm^2 ))</td>
<td>57 5</td>
<td>54 4</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta I_{sc} ) histamine (( \mu A/cm^2 ))</td>
<td>70 21</td>
<td>65 19</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta I_{sc} ) theophylline (( \mu A/cm^2 ))</td>
<td>115 31</td>
<td>144 31</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( I_{sc} \): short-circuit current. 
For details of diets and procedures, see p. 489.

Carboxymethylcellulose and digesta characteristics

As expected, high-viscosity CMC increased digesta viscosity all along the small and large intestines of our piglets, in agreement with previous studies (Smits et al. 1993a; Piel et al. 2001; Hopwood et al. 2002). Gastric pH was higher and digesta amounts lower in our CMC piglets than in the controls. A higher pH may have resulted from a reduced secretion of hydrochloric acid and/or an increased dilution by a faster passage rate of the liquid phase, as suggested for gizzard pH in birds fed CMC (van der Klis et al. 1993a). A faster passage rate of liquid soon after the meal is supported by a lower gastric load as seen at slaughter in the present study. Nevertheless, highly viscous NSP are usually considered to increase the overall mean retention of digesta in the gastrointestinal tract (van der Klis et al. 1993a) despite increased motility (Cherbut et al. 1990).

McDonald et al. (2001) reported an unexpectedly lower pH in the large intestine of pigs fed CMC. They suggested that CMC inhibited volatile fatty acid absorption since volatile fatty acid production normally decreases digesta pH and because CMC is considered as non-fermentable (Wyatt et al. 1988; McDonald et al. 2001). We also noted a lower pH in the caecum and proximal colon. In the digestion part of our research (Piel et al. 2005), we observed similar flows of ileal digesta and, therefore, similar loads of undigested material reaching the large intestine, with both treatments, suggesting potentially similar fermentation profiles in the caecum and proximal colon between diets. Altogether, the present results support the hypothesis that CMC inhibits volatile fatty acid absorption (McDonald et al. 2001).

Diet composition, digesta viscosity and bacterial overgrowth

Australian studies have consistently shown that a highly digestible diet based on cooked white rice and animal protein is able to limit intestinal proliferation of pathogenic E. coli and to protect weaned pigs against colibacillosis (McDonald et al. 2001; Hopwood et al. 2002; Montagne et al. 2004). Conversely, diets supplemented with soluble NSP or other indigestible compounds, including guar gum (McDonald et al. 1999), CMC of varying viscosities (McDonald et al. 2001; Hopwood et al. 2002; Montagne et al. 2004), or mixtures of plant protein sources without or with wheat (Montagne et al. 2004), all predisposed pigs to bacterial overgrowth and colibacillosis. The present diet based on skimmed milk powder and maltodextrin was highly digestible and of low intestinal viscosity (Piel et al. 2005). No proliferation of aerobic bacteria and \( \beta \)-haemolytic E. coli was detected in the faeces of piglets fed high-viscosity CMC. The lack of bacterial proliferation and the protection conferred by a high proportion of dairy products are possible reasons for the absence of colibacillosis in the present study. Australian studies extended their observation of the protective effect of the cooked rice diet against other diseases like swine dysentery caused by the proliferation of Brachyspira hysodesenteriae (Siba et al. 1996; Durmic et al. 1998; Pluske et al. 1998).
However, this was not confirmed by a recent Danish work (Lindecrona et al. 2003).

**Conclusions and implications**

In the present study, the addition of high-viscosity CMC to a highly digestible weaner diet for pigs based on skimmed milk powder and maltodextrin tended to stimulate Na-dependent absorption and reduced intestinal carbachol-induced chloride secretory activity of the jejunal. This was observed without inducing haemolytic colibacillosis despite increased digesta viscosity. These data support the idea that the degraded faeces consistency after 5 d of CMC consumption was not the result of intestinal hypersecretion and diarrhoea but of the water-holding and swelling capacities of the high-viscosity CMC used. Increasing digesta viscosity through the diet is apparently not sufficient to alter intestinal physiology in the absence of pathogenic bacteria in young pigs.

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