Short Communication

Measuring glycaemic responses: duplicate fasting samples or duplicate measures of one fasting sample?

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(Received 11 January 2006 – Revised 6 June 2006 – Accepted 27 June 2006)

The precision with which glycaemic responses, expressed as incremental area under the curve (AUC), can be measured may be improved by using the average of several measures of fasting blood glucose (FBG). To see if taking two fasting blood samples would increase the precision of AUC, the glycaemic responses elicited by four test meals (50 g glucose; 50 g glucose plus 10 g fat and 10 g protein; 100 g white bread; 100 g white bread plus 10 g fat and 10 g protein) were determined in thirteen overnight-fasted healthy subjects. Two fasting blood samples were taken 5 min apart (−5 min and 0 min before starting to eat) with glucose measured three times in each sample. AUC was calculated using different estimates of FBG derived from the three measures of glucose in the two fasting blood samples and each set of AUC values subjected to ANOVA. Unexpectedly, the results were more precise when AUC was calculated from mean glucose in the 0 min blood sample (FBG0) than from mean glucose in the two different fasting blood samples. The 95% CI of the AUC calculated using FBG0 in thirteen subjects was ±29%: to obtain the same CI using the mean of the two fasting blood samples would require fourteen subjects. These results suggest that taking two fasting blood samples does not necessarily improve, and may even reduce, the precision of AUC as a measure of glycaemic response. Further studies are needed before requiring that two fasting blood samples be taken for determining glycaemic index.

Abbreviations: AUC, area under the curve; FBG, fasting blood glucose; GI, glycaemic index.
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Methods

There is much interest in measuring the glycaemic responses elicited by foods because high postprandial glucose or diets with a high glycaemic load are associated with increased risk for CVD (Coutinho et al. 1999; Liu et al. 2000), diabetes (Salmerón et al. 1997) and cancer (Augustin et al. 2001; Higginsbotham et al. 2004). In addition, diets with a low glycaemic index (GI) or low glycaemic load improve glycaemic control (Brand-Miller et al. 2003), increase β-cell function (Wolever & Mehling, 2002) and insulin sensitivity (Frost et al. 1998), and may influence mood, memory (Benton & Nabb, 2003) and body-weight regulation (Ebbeling et al. 2003). Glycaemic responses are commonly measured as incremental area under the curve (AUC). The blood sampling schedule and way of calculating AUC influence the results obtained (Wolever, 2004). AUC may also be affected by the precision of the estimate of fasting blood glucose (FBG) concentration. The estimate of FBG may be made more precise by averaging several measures; thus, it has been suggested that two fasting blood samples should be taken for determining the GI of foods (Standards Australia, 2005). However, the effect of using two fasting blood samples on the precision of the resulting AUC values is not known (Brouns et al. 2005). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to see if taking two fasting blood samples improved the power to detect significant differences in AUC between different test meals compared with measuring glucose two or three times in a single blood sample.

Human glycaemic responses: Carbohydrates: Glucose: Glycaemic index: Methodology

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Mean values (n 52; thirteen subjects, 4 d) of the first, second and third glucose determinations of FBG-5 were 4.247 (SD 0.445), 4.242 (SD 0.464) and 4.243 (SD 0.450), and of FBG0 were 4.281 (SD 0.425), 4.277 (SD 0.426) and 4.251 (SD 0.414) mmol/l, respectively; these six means did not differ significantly from each other (F(5, 255) 1.38; P = 0.23). The mean values of FBG-5, FBG0 and FBG-0, respectively, were 4.251 (SD 0.447), 4.275 (SD 0.411) and 4.263 (SD 0.421) mmol/l. The SD of analytical variation of FBG was 0.066 mmol/l (CV 1.54 %); corresponding values for minute-to-minute, day-to-day (within subject) and between-subject variation were: 0.111 (CV 2.61 %), 0.216 (CV 5.07 %) and 0.379 mmol/l (CV 8.91 %), respectively.

Mean glycaemic responses elicited by the four test meals are shown in Fig. 1, and the AUC calculated using different measures of FBG in Table 1. The mean AUC values for each test meal were very similar for the different measures of FBG. There were significant main effects of carbohydrate source and presence of fat and protein on AUC, and no significant interaction, whatever the method used to determine FBG (Table 1). Compared with FBG0, using FBG0 to calculate AUC reduced margin of error, increased F and reduced the P values (Table 1). However, when FBG-5 was used to calculate AUC, the margin of error was larger, F smaller, and the P values larger than for FBG0. The 95 % CI (CI 1.96 × SD/√n) of mean AUC calculated from FBG0 was ±29.8 (n 13).

To obtain the same CI for FBG0, would require 13.3 subjects, and for FBG-5.0 would require 13.6 subjects.

Discussion

The results showed that using the average of two measurements of glucose in the 0 min fasting blood sample, instead of only one, increased power to detect differences in AUC between test meals. Surprisingly, however, using the average glucose from two fasting blood samples taken 5 min apart to calculate AUC tended to reduce the statistical power. This suggests that taking more than one fasting blood sample is not necessarily an effective strategy for improving the power to detect differences in glycaemic response between different test meals. These data also suggest that, for best results, there should be as short an interval of time as possible between the fasting blood sample and the start of test meal consumption.

Based on the statistical principle that variances are additive, small analytical errors in metabolite concentrations result in larger errors in values derived from calculations involving the results of several measurements (Kringle & Johnson, 1986). AUC is calculated from multiple measures of blood glucose and is particularly dependent on the value of FBG because FBG is subtracted from every other blood glucose value. A FBG difference of 0.1 mmol/l (about 2 %) could result in an AUC difference of up to 12 mmol × min/l over a 2 h period; this represents 10 % of the average AUC elicited by 100 g white bread in sixty-eight normal subjects (Wolever et al., 2003). If variances are additive, it follows, therefore, that improving analytical precision of FBG by even a small amount should improve the precision of AUC values, which, in turn, would be reflected in more power to detect differences in AUC.

Taking the average > 1 measurement of FBG will improve precision by a factor of CV/√n, where CV is the random variation and n is the number of measures taken. Since sources of
variation in FBG include analytical and minute-to-minute variation, variation can be reduced by measuring glucose more than once in a single blood sample or by measuring glucose in more than one blood sample. Since the magnitude of minute-to-minute variation, CV 2.6%, was 70% greater than that for analytical variation, CV 1.5%, taking two blood samples would have been expected to reduce variation of AUC more than measuring glucose twice in a single sample. However, this was not the case. How can this be explained?

Measuring glucose at 1 min intervals reveals the existence of approximately sinusoidal fluctuations with amplitude ±0.05–0.20 mmol/l about the mean and frequency 6–12 per h (Abdullah et al. 1997; Melanson et al. 1999). Presumably the time blood glucose starts to rise after eating is related to the time of starting to eat, i.e. time 0 min, rather than at some other time, such as ~5 min. Thus, using average blood glucose in several fasting blood samples may be a less precise measure of the true baseline and yield a less precise estimate of AUC than the blood glucose concentration just before eating. The implication of this is that, for most precise measurement of AUC, multiple fasting blood samples should not be taken and as little time as possible should elapse between taking the fasting blood sample and starting to eat the test meal. However, if analytical variation of glucose is greater than minute-to-minute variation this conclusion may not hold, and it may be useful to obtain several fasting blood samples.

The results of the present study are relevant to the recent draft proposal for an official method for determining the GI of foods (Standards Australia, 2005), in which it is specified that two fasting blood samples shall be taken within 5 min of each other and the average result used as the baseline blood glucose concentration for the purposes of calculating GI. Taking an extra blood sample increases costs, which could only be justified if the results were improved. However, the present study showed that using the mean of two fasting blood samples resulted in less statistical power than a single blood sample just before starting to eat. It should be noted that the present results do not necessarily apply to GI, since each food was only tested once in each subject, and, therefore, we cannot calculate valid GI values from the data. Nevertheless, since GI is calculated from AUC, the present results suggest that taking two fasting blood samples may not necessarily reduce, and may even increase, the variability of GI values. Thus, taking two fasting blood samples should not be a requirement for GI testing, at least until it has been shown to reliably improve the results of GI testing.

It is concluded that taking two fasting blood samples does not necessarily improve, and may even reduce, the precision of AUC as a measure of glycaemic response. Further studies are needed before requiring that two fasting blood samples be taken for determining GI.

References


Acknowledgements

The present study was supported by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and Glycaemic Index Testing, Inc. (GI Testing), Toronto, ON, Canada. Ms Moghaddam was supported by an Industrial Postgraduate Scholarship jointly funded by NSERC and GI Testing.


