Peripheral blood mononuclear cell gene expression and plasma protein profiles are differentially affected by glucose and lipid tolerance tests


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Peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) are an easily accessed tissue type that show differential gene expression following nutritional stimulus in vivo\(^1\). This study addressed the hypothesis that the PBMC transcriptomic signature and the associated metabolic phenotype would be differentially regulated by lipid v. carbohydrate nutritional challenges\(^2\).

An oral lipid tolerance test (OLTT) and a glucose tolerance test (OGTT) were completed in a ‘lean’ cohort of ten individuals selected from a representative sample of 200 healthy Irish adults aged 18–60 years (age: 24.6 ± 3.84 years, BMI: 24.5 ± 2.2 kg.m\(^2\)). Fasting and postprandial peak plasma and PBMC samples were taken at 1 and 4h post-OGTT and -OLTT, respectively. RNA was hybridised to Affymetrix Human Gene ST 1.0 arrays. Microarray data were normalised using RMA and R/BioConductor determined differentially expressed genes. The metabolic profile of volunteers was characterised including plasma TAG, NEFA, glucose, insulin and inflammatory profiles were determined.

A total of 2292 genes were differentially expressed following OLTT. No single genes were significantly differentially expressed following OGTT. The genes showing greatest changes in expression post-OLTT include CENPK, CLC, OCLN, TMEM176A, FOLR3, ANKRD22, VNN1 and PGA5 (all log Fc > ±1.3). Key genes involved in lipid metabolism (LPL, LRP1, PLIN3) and inflammation (IKBKG, NLRP3) were increased following the OLTT, but not OGTT. The KEGG pathway showing greatest enrichment, Fc gamma R-mediated phagocytosis, also contains genes related to inflammation. Most notably, the ERK-activated cPLA2 gene is present, which modulates arachidonic acid (AA) and EPA release from DAG. Given the central role of AA/EPA, this may affect downstream eicosanoid, pros-taglandin, leukotriene or resolvin production.

The transcriptomic signature will be related to the metabolic phenotype, which included an increase in plasma glucose following the OGTT \(P<0.0001\), elevated plasma TAG post-OLTT \(P = 0.0354\) and lower NEFA concentration following both OGTT \(P<0.0001\) and OLTT \(P = 0.001\). Interestingly the increase in inflammatory gene expression was associated with greater postprandial plasma IL-6 \(P = 0.0091\) and EGF \(P = 0.0053\) and a decrease in IFNG \(P = 0.104\) concentrations post-OLTT, with no such changes post-OGTT.

In conclusion, the OLTT induced a pro-inflammatory state in the PBMC transcriptome and plasma protein markers implicated in insulin resistance, the Metabolic Syndrome and T2DM, with no such response following OGTT.

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