The Effect of Excess Iron on the Impairment of Glucose Metabolism in Mice

Abstract— Excess iron in the body can trigger pathological conditions through production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the deposition in various organs. This condition can also disrupt whole metabolism process, including glucose metabolism. However, the mechanisms between iron and glucose metabolism remain unclear. The study was to investigate the effect of excess iron with glucose metabolism disorder by assessing Glucose Tolerance Test (GTT) and gluconeogenesis rate in mice through Intraperitoneal Glucose Tolerance Test (IPGTT) to determine insulin resistance, Intraperitoneal Pyruvate Tolerance Test (IPTT) to measure hepatic gluconeogenesis, and to assess pancreatic histology for routine histological examination. In this experimental study, eight-teen male mice were assigned to three equal groups. Mice were divided by the saline injected group (control) and iron dextran injection 0.1 mg/mice (group 2) and 0.3 mg/mice (group 3) dose of injection. Iron dextran was injected daily intraperitoneally. After 14 days of treatment, IPGTT, IPTT and pancreas histology were examined. Repeated analysis of variance (ANOVA) with bonferroni’s posthoc multiple comparison test were used for data analysis. IPGTT results showed glucose level was lower 39.85 % in group 3 compared to the control group mice. The results of IPTT showed that glucose level in mice treated with iron dextran were significantly lower in dose dependent manner. Pancreas histology showed islet cells in group 3 decreased in size, which might be due to beta cells depletion. Short term iron injection increases glucose tolerance and supresses hepatic gluconeogenesis in mice.

Keywords - Excess Iron, Glucose Metabolism Disorder, Intraperitoneal Glucose Tolerance Test (IPGTT), Intaperitoneal Pyruvate Tolerance Test (IPTT).

1 INTRODUCTION

Iron is an essential element for synthesis of haemoglobin in the erythrocytes, cofactor for oxidation-reduction reactions, and cell proliferation. The average daily iron intake is 1-2 mg/day and the amount is strictly regulated to fit the body needs. Excess iron in the body can trigger pathological conditions through the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) that cause organ dysfunction [1,2]. Excess iron accumulate in several organs including the heart, liver, and endocrine organs and can lead to serious problems such as cardiomyopathy, liver failure, and diabetes [1,3].

The first evidence for association of iron with human diabetes mellitus comes from clinical observations in individuals with pathologic iron overload e.g in patients with thalassemia who undergo transfusions on a regular basis to maintain the amount of erythrocytes. The prevalence of diabetes mellitus in thalassemia patients is 6 to 14% [4]. It is suggested that the cause of diabetes mellitus in β thalassemia major patients is due to iron accumulation in the liver which reduce the hepatic clearence of insulin that lead to hyperinsulinemia and insulin resistance. Over time, Insulin resistance will contribute to high-insulin-dependent pancreatic injury. Other than that, diabetes mellitus in β thalassemia major is also caused by pancreatic beta cell damage due to direct oxidant effects of iron accumulation in the pancreas [1,2,5,6]. The deposition of iron in the liver and pancreas can impair glucose tolerance and may progress to overt diabetes mellitus [7,8].

The condition of iron overload can disrupt glucose metabolism and cause hyperinsulinemia through decreased insulin extraction and insulin signaling [9,10]. Insulin has effect on increasing the synthesis of ferritin and redistributing of transferrin receptors (TfRs) in cells so that large amounts of iron can enter cells and tissues, decreasing the regulation of hepsidine expression in hepatocytes and adipocytes, stimulating expression of ferroportin, ferritin heavy chain
(FTH), and ferritin light chain (FTL), reducing the expression of transferrin in adipocytes, and increasing the production of free radicals from hepatocytes [10,11]. Iron can also catalyze the conversion of less-reactive free radicals into highly active free radicals that inhibit antioxidant defenses in cells [11,12]. Beta cells are highly sensitive to free radicals due to the low amount of antioxidant expression such as catalase and superoxide dismutase (SOD) [3,11,12].

The mechanisms underlying increased iron deposition in the body during the development of insulin resistance and diabetes mellitus remain unclear. Therefore, animal models are needed to explain the effect of iron overload on glucose metabolism. This study was an attempt to investigate the effect of excess iron content and its relation to glucose metabolism disorder in mice through Intraperitoneal Glucose Tolerance Test (IPGTT) to determine insulin resistance, Intraperitoneal Pyruvate Tolerance Test (IPTT) to measure hepatic gluconeogenesis [13] and to assess pancreatic histology for routine histological examination.

2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Animals

This study was approved by the Ethical Committee on Research of the Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia No:715/UN6.C.10/PN/2017. All experiments were conducted based on the 3R and 5F principles.

Male white mice (Mus musculus), 8-10 weeks old and body weight approximately 25-30 g, were maintained in cages at room temperature and a 12-hour light/dark cycle with adequate air circulation. Mice were purchased from Bio Farma company, Bandung. All mice were provided food and water ad libitum.

2.2 Grouping of Experimental Group According to Dosage of Iron Administration

Mice were divided into 3 groups based on the dose of hemadex (iron dextran) injection. The number of mice was six for each group:

a. Group I (control): Saline injection 200 µL/day
b. Group II: Hemadex injection 0.1 mg/200 µL/day intraperitoneally

Before the treatment, mice were adapted for one week and injection was performed daily for 14 days. The dose was calculated to finding Animal Equivalent Dose (AED) by multiplying human dose (mg/kg) with Km ratio [14]. Daily transfusion iron loading in human is 0.34 mg/kg and the Km ratio to convert human dose in mg/kg to AED in mg/kg is multiply human dose by 12.3 [14,15].

2.3 Glucose Tolerance Test

Mice were fasted for 18 hours before test. D-Glucose was intraperitoneally administered at 1 g/kg body weight. Blood sample was collected from the tail vessel and measured by the glucometer (GlucoDr, Korea) at 0, 30, 60, and 120 min [16].

2.4 Pyruvate Tolerance Test

After 18 hours of fasting, sodium pyruvate (1 g/kg body weight) was injected intraperitoneally and blood was collected from tail at indicated time as previously described [17].

2.5 Histology

Mice in each group were sacrificed by cervical dislocation. Pancreas was isolated and tissue sections were fixed in 10% formalin. Tissue sections were stained with hematoxylin and eosin for routine histologic examination and examined under the light microscopy under a ×10 objective in 20 random fields [18].

2.6 Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed with IBM SPSS. Treatment differences were determined using repeated analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Bonferroni’s posthoc multiple comparison test were performed to evaluate the differences between groups. A p-value of <0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 IPGTT Measurement

The effect of intraperitoneal injection of D-glucose solution at 0, 30, 60, 120 min in the control and treatment groups are shown in Fig. 1. Blood glucose levels were not different among the groups before glucose injection. Thirty minutes after glucose injection, blood glucose levels were strikingly increased in all groups. There were no differences in blood glucose levels between group 1 and group 2. However, the blood glucose
level was much higher in group 1 compared to group 3 at 30 and 60 minutes after glucose injection and there were significant differences in blood glucose level (p<0.05).

3.2 IPTT Measurement
The effect of intraperitoneal injection of pyruvate solution at 0, 30, 60, 120 min in the control and treatment groups are shown in Fig. 2. Blood glucose level was different between group control and treatment before sodium pyruvate injection. Thirty minutes after sodium pyruvate injection, blood glucose level was strikingly increased in group 1 and group 2 but changes in blood glucose level in group 3 was not to high. However, there was significant different in blood glucose level between group control and treatments (p<0.05).

The result indicated treatment group show better glucose tolerance than the control, it might be due to short period iron injection. The development of glucose intolerance initiated by hyperinsulinemia due to hepatic disturbance of insulin utilization, this state can persist long time until glucose intolerance become apparent. Prolonged hyperinsulinemia causes pancreatic beta cells failure in secreting insulin by increase both cleaved caspase-3 protein and activity, increase apoptosis, and diminish cell number that leads to uncontrolled diabetes [19]. In this study the possibility of diabetes mellitus process has not happened but the process that initiate diabetes mellitus by hyperinsulinemia already seen. This condition may cause the IPGTT result to be lower than the control.

Iron is also known to facilitate insulin secretion from the pancreas. Under normal condition iron in beta cells is important in the process of insulin secretion, either through the fenton reactions that produce ROS or by maintaining the electron transport reaction in the mitochondria to form ATP so that insulin can be secreted through exocytosis [2].

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gluconeogenesis in the liver that can suppress gluconeogenesis. AMPK is known to inhibit hepatic glucose production by suppressed gluconeogenic enzymes. So it can be concluded, a high-iron diet improves glucose tolerance by activating AMPK through a mechanism that includes deacetylation [20,21].

3.3 Pancreas Histology of Mice

![Figure 3](image_url)

Islet cells in group 3 show decrease in size, it might be due to beta cells depletion by oxidant effect of excess iron. Physiologically, there is significant amounts of hydrogen peroxide are produced in cytoplasm and mitochondria to run cellular metabolism and signal transduction processes. In normal condition, hydrogen peroxide is converted to water by glutathione peroxidase and catalase expressed by beta cell pancreas, but in the presence of highly active iron the hydrogen peroxide will converted to hydroxyl radical which have cytotoxic effect by attacking and denaturing the functional and structural molecule incuding nucleic acid, carbohydrate, protein, and lipids [4,22].

Pancreatic beta cells highly vulnerable to oxidative damage, this condition is probably based on nearly reliance upon mitochondrial metabolism of glucose for glucose induce insulin secretion [23]. Besides that, beta cells have low antioxidant enzymes gene expression. Compared with liver, islets contain only 1% catalase, 2% glutathione peroxidase 1 (GPX 1), and 29% Zn-superoxide dismutase 1 (SOD1) activities. The low expression of antioxidant enzymes makes β-cells susceptible to oxidative stress [24].

Previous studies have shown the effect of excess iron on islet cells is the presence of grouped chromatin, dilation of nuclear membrane, endoplasmic reticulum, and light secretory granules on beta cells. The apoptotic and necrosis features are shown by beta cells, in alpha cells and delta cells occurring accumulation of iron but no apoptosis and necrosis occur [2]. Study by Cooksey also showed general loss of beta cells in iron overload mice, mice with Hfe<sup>-/-</sup> exhibit a 45% decrease in islet surface area compared with control group [22]. Failure of pancreatic beta cells is an early condition in the development of diabetes [2].

4 CONCLUSION

In short periods, iron injections resulted in lower blood glucose levels than the control group. This is likely because the body is in a condition of hyperinsulinenia. The mechanism of glucose intolerance due to iron overload may occur periodically preceded by hyperinsulinenia which then gives negative feedback on pancreatic beta cells so that the pancreatic beta cells are less work and ultimately apoptotic. In addition, beta cells can also experience necrosis due to the accumulation of iron directly on the cell. Depletion of pancreatic beta cells is supported by histology of pancreas that is shrinked in size in group treatment. Iron injections also decrease the rate of hepatic gluconeogenesis due to the suppression of gluconeogenic enzymes.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

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