In vivo production of prostacyclin and thromboxane in patients with acute myocardial infarction

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SUMMARY The in vivo production of prostacyclin and thromboxane was monitored by measuring their major urinary metabolites 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ in ten patients with acute myocardial infarction, five on standard treatment and five receiving prostacyclin infusion. During acute myocardial infarction excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅, measured by a gas chromatography-mass spectrometry method with deuterated internal standards, was significantly increased. This indicates that thromboxane and prostacyclin synthesis are increased during the development of acute myocardial infarction. The excretion data for 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ showed that after administration of aspirin there was less pronounced and more variable inhibition than expected. Prostacyclin infusion did not markedly affect the excretion of the thromboxane metabolite.

There has been considerable interest in the possible role of platelets in the pathogenesis of acute myocardial infarction.¹ The discovery of thromboxane A₂ and its vasoconstricting and platelet aggregating effects has focused attention on the possible involvement of this platelet-derived compound in cardiovascular disease.² Similarly the discovery of prostacyclin and its vasodilatory and platelet anti-aggregatory effects triggered off intense research on the possible role of this compound in protective mechanisms against cardiovascular disease.³

Studies on the possible involvement of those compounds in human cardiovascular disease have long been hampered by the lack of suitable methods for monitoring the in vivo production of thromboxane A₂ and prostacyclin. Thromboxane A₂ and prostacyclin are chemically degraded in vivo to thromboxane B₂ and 6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ respectively. It is highly questionable, however, whether measurement of thromboxane B₂ in blood reflects thromboxane A₂ synthesis in vivo.⁴ Increasing evidence also suggests that concentrations of 6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ found in samples of peripheral blood do not reflect the formation of prostacyclin in vivo.⁵⁻⁸

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The in vivo metabolism of thromboxane B₂ and prostacyclin has been studied in man and the main urinary metabolites have been identified as 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ respectively.⁹¹⁰ Methods for analysis of these compounds have been developed based on deuterated internal standards/carriers and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry.¹¹⁻¹⁴ Excretion of those metabolites quickly (0.5–1.5 hours) and adequately reflects changes in the production of thromboxane A₂ and prostacyclin in vivo.⁷¹⁴⁻¹⁶ The intra-individual variation in the excretion of these metabolites is small and independent of urine production.¹⁶ The excretion of the prostacyclin metabolite is, however, considerably increased by physical exercise.¹⁴

We report on the formation of thromboxane A₂ and prostacyclin in vivo during and after the development of myocardial infarction.¹⁷

Patients and methods

All patients were admitted to the coronary care unit less than seven hours after the onset of chest pain. A diagnosis of myocardial infarction was confirmed by creatine kinase MB estimations every four hours. Five patients were given placebo infusion and five had prostacyclin infusion (4–5 ng/kg/min) for 96 hours as well as conventional treatment.¹⁸ Urine was
collected continuously before and every eight hours during the infusion period and was analysed for 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅. This design was selected in order to study not only the magnitude but also the dynamics of the synthesis of thromboxane and prostacyclin. A 12 hour urine collection was obtained from most individuals seven to nine months after the acute myocardial infarction.

The methods that we used to measure 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ in urine have been described in detail elsewhere.¹³⁻¹⁴

**Results**

The Table shows the results from the initial chest x ray investigation as well as the medication given to each individual as a result of the clinical decision reached during the first three days after admission. All patients were given 0.5 g of aspirin and 225 mg dipyridamole 72 hours after the start of the infusion as a part of the study protocol. Figure 1 shows the urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ from the five patients (cases A–E) on placebo infusion and Fig. 2 their excretion from patients (F–J) on prostacyclin. The excretion rate of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ in normal healthy individuals is 130–535 pg/mg creatinine and 38–508 pg/mg creatinine respectively.¹³⁻¹⁴ Descrip-

**Table Medication in study group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No</th>
<th>Initial chest x ray findings</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Congestive heart failure</td>
<td>Morphine 28 mg iv, practolol 2 mg iv, frusemide 120 mg iv, aspirin 1.5 g oral</td>
<td>Frusemide 80 mg oral</td>
<td>Frusemide 80 mg oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Morphine 17.5 mg iv, frusemide 120 mg iv, 0</td>
<td>Morphine 5 mg iv</td>
<td>Metoprolol 150 mg oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Pethidine 25 mg iv, frusemide 20 mg iv</td>
<td>Metoprolol 150 mg oral</td>
<td>Metoprolol 150 mg oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Morphine 10 mg iv</td>
<td>Metoprolol 200 mg oral</td>
<td>Metoprolol 200 mg oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Enlarged</td>
<td>Morphine 20 mg iv, frusemide 20 mg iv, metoprolol 200 mg oral</td>
<td>Morphine 20 mg iv, aspirin 8 g oral, hydrocortisone 100 mg iv, frusemide 40 mg oral, aminophylline 150 mg oral</td>
<td>Aspirin 8 g oral, metoprolol 150 mg oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Enlarged</td>
<td>Morphine 18 mg iv, frusemide 80 mg iv</td>
<td>Frusemide 40 mg oral, aminophylline 100 mg oral, aspirin 1.5 g oral</td>
<td>Aspirin 1.5 g oral, aspirin 2.0 g oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Congestive heart failure</td>
<td>Morphine 38 mg iv, frusemide 80 mg iv</td>
<td>Frusemide 40 mg oral, aspirin 1.5 g oral, ketobemidone 10 mg iv, frusemide 100 mg iv</td>
<td>Aspirin 0.5 g + 1.0 g oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Congestive heart failure</td>
<td>Pethidine 25 mg iv, ketobemidone 10 mg iv, frusemide 100 mg iv</td>
<td>Frusemide 40 mg oral, aspirin 1.5 g oral, ketobemidone 10 mg iv, frusemide 100 mg iv</td>
<td>Aspirin 1.5 g oral, ketobemidone 10 mg iv, frusemide 100 mg iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Congestive heart failure</td>
<td>Morphine 5 mg iv, frusemide 20 mg iv</td>
<td>Frusemide 40 mg oral, aspirin 1.0 g oral</td>
<td>Frusemide 40 mg oral, frusemide 80 mg oral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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of the individual cases are given below. Apart from aspirin none of the conventional drugs (such as morphine and frusemide) that were given affected the excretion of the thromboxane and prostacyclin metabolites.

**Patient A**—The initial excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ was clearly higher than that seen in normal males. The patient received 500 mg of aspirin because of pain 9, 15, and 22 hours after the start of infusion. This reduced the excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ by about half to 378 pg/mg creatinine. Another dose of 500 mg aspirin at 69 h caused a further reduction from 205 to 124 pg/mg creatinine. Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ was initially within the limits for normal healthy males, but there was a continuous increase in concentrations up to 3110 pg/mg creatinine from seven to 15 hours after the maximum creatine kinase MB concentration.

**Patient B**—Before and during the first 2-5 days of infusion urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ was two to four times higher than the highest excretion seen in normal healthy females. Sixty one hours after the start of the infusion she was given 500 mg of aspirin, and 4-12 hours afterwards excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ increased to 5646 pg/mg creatinine. This patient initially had normal urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ that later increased to a peak of 3605 pg/mg creatinine. Nine months later excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-

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The patient was given 2-5 mg of morphine at 0-15 h during infusion she was given 500 mg of aspirin, and 4-12 hours afterwards excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ increased to 5646 pg/mg creatinine. This patient initially had normal urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ that later increased to a peak of 3605 pg/mg creatinine. Nine months later excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-

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Fig. 1 Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ in patients on a placebo infusion. 0 h, indicates start of infusion. Each data point along the time axis is plotted for the middle of each period of urine collection. Arrow with asterisk indicates the time at which creatine kinase MB was highest. In adults normal excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ is 130–535 pg/mg creatinine and of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ it is 38–508 pg/mg creatinine (n = 20 both groups).

Fig. 2 Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ and 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅ in patients on a prostacyclin infusion. 0 h, see legend to Fig. 1 for explanation.
The urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was initially within normal limits for healthy males. It then increased to a maximum of 755 pg/mg creatinine. Seven months later excretion was 119 pg/mg creatinine.

**Patient E**—Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was within the normal range until about 50 hours after creatine kinase MB concentration reached a maximum, then it increased to a peak of 650 pg/mg creatinine. A dose of aspirin (500 mg) reduced the urinary excretion rate of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) by about 70%. Eight months later urinary excretion was 318 pg/mg creatinine. The initial urinary excretion rate of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F\(_1\alpha\) was within the normal range but it then increased abruptly to a maximum of 6348 pg/mg creatinine. This abrupt increase was not associated with any obvious clinical symptom. Eight months later urinary excretion was 240 pg/mg creatinine.

**Prostacyclin (Epoprostenol) Infusion**

After the start of prostacyclin infusion the excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F\(_1\alpha\) increased to around 30,000 pg/mg creatinine.

**Patient F**—In the first urine samples the urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was 459 and 472 pg/mg creatinine and thereafter the excretion fell to around 200 pg/mg creatinine. Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F\(_1\alpha\) was increased in the first urine sample, probably because the infusion was started 0.5 hour before the collection of the first urine sample was completed. As expected excretion increased even more during the infusion.

**Patient G**—Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was initially somewhat raised (peak value 630 pg/mg creatinine). The development of a severe pericarditis (at about 20 hours) required treatment with 8 g of aspirin daily combined with injection of 100 mg hydrocortisone. Despite this large dose of aspirin urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) only decreased slowly to about 30% of the maximum level. Seven months later the excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was 249 pg/mg creatinine.

**Patient H**—During the first day of prostacyclin infusion the urinary excretion rate of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was clearly higher than the excretion rate in normal healthy males. Twenty eight hours after the start of the infusion the patient was started on 1.5 g aspirin daily for pericarditis. An abrupt reduction in excretion (by about 80%) followed. Eight months later excretion of the thromboxane metabolite was 320 pg/mg creatinine.

**Patient I**—Urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) in the initial sample was clearly higher (755 pg/mg creatinine) than that in normal healthy males. The patient received 500 mg aspirin at about 25 hours, and this reduced urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) by 50–60%. Later the patient was given more aspirin (3 g in total) without any further reduction of the excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\). The excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) seven months later was 115 pg/mg creatinine.

**Patient J**—The urinary excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B\(_2\) was slightly higher than normal.
normal for most of the study. Eight months later
the excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ was
173 pg/mg creatinine.

**STATISTICAL EVALUATION**

We compared the initial and follow up values on the
excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ in the eight
cases in which we were able to collect follow up sam-
plies (Fig. 3). The mean initial excretion was 771
(410) pg/mg creatinine (mean (SD)) and the follow
up excretion was 268 (167) pg/mg creatinine (mean
(SD)). Student's t test for paired samples showed a
highly significant difference (p<0.01) between the
initial and follow up excretion.

**Discussion**

We found a prolonged increase in the in vivo syn-
thesis of thromboxane and prostacyclin during the
acute phase of myocardial infarction. This suggests
that these substances may be involved in the patho-
physiology of acute myocardial infarction.

In all patients except case F excretion of
2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ was higher than normal
during at least part of the study period. Since there
is little variation (SD 10–23%) in the excretion of
2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ in a normal individual
over weeks and months, we believe that the finding
that maximum increases seen during the study
were 2–11 times higher than those found 7–9
months later is more important than the general rise
in excretion. There was also a highly significant
difference between the excretion in the very first
urine sample, which was collected before any treat-
ment was started, and in that obtained 7–9 months
later. Moreover the excretion in one and the same
individual during the first 80 hours was very vari-
able; the ratio between the highest and lowest values
ranged from about 1:5:1 to 3:5:1 (values for case A
and after aspirin are not included). Thus both the
level of and the variability of the excretion of
2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ strongly suggest the
involvement of thromboxane in the pathogenesis of
acute myocardial infarction.

Excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅₂₀
in four of the cases without prostaglin infusion
was initially within the normal range. Thereafter the
excretion increased, reaching a peak 2–20 hours after
the maximum creatine kinase MB value. Excretion
of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅₂₀ varies in
healthy individuals (intra-individual variation
16–31% SD) and increases considerably during
physical exercise. Despite the fact that our
patients remained in bed, the maximum concen-
trations seen in cases A, B, C, and E were far above
(or in case D, close to), concentrations found in
normal individuals during strenuous exercise. In
all cases (A–J) excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-
prostaglandin F₁₅₂₀ seven to nine months later was
within the range seen in normal individuals. Thus
prostaglin synthesis in vivo is increased during an
acute myocardial infarction. Synthesis is greatest
soon after maximal disintegration of myocardial tis-
ue, as indicated by the appearance of creatine kinase
MB in the circulation.

Excretion of 2,3-dinor-6-keto-prostaglandin F₁₅₂₀
before infusion of prostaglin was within normal
limits and increased to about 30 000 pg/mg crea-
tinine during infusion. The infusion had no obvious
immediate effect on the excretion of the throm-
boxane metabolite. These data seem to contradict
the idea that exogenous prostaglin will reduce in
vivo thromboxane synthesis.

Three individuals in each group were given aspir-
in during the study. Only three of them, E, H, and
I, showed an abrupt reduction in 2,3-dinor-
thromboxane B₂ excretion (by 65%, 82%, and 65%
respectively). These values are similar to or only
slightly higher than those seen in normal individuals
after 500 mg of aspirin. The effect of aspirin on the
excretion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ in cases A,
B, and G, however, is distinctly different from that
seen in normal individuals. In case A a dose of
3 × 500 mg aspirin caused a 55% decrease in
urinary 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ from 880 to
about 378 pg/mg creatinine. A further 500 mg aspir-
in given at 6 h caused another reduction from 205
to 124 pg/mg creatinine. Patient B was given 500 mg
aspirin at 61 hours when symptoms of what later
turned out to be a post-myocardial infarction syn-
drome first appeared. The urine sample collected
after this showed an enormous increase in the excre-
tion of 2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂. Patient G devel-
opred symptoms of pericarditis around 20 hours after
the start of infusion and daily doses of 8 g aspirin
were given. Despite this large dose excretion of
2,3-dinor-thromboxane B₂ declined only gradually
to around 150 pg/mg creatinine. Aspirin has less
effect on thromboxane synthesis during acute myo-
cardial infarction (that is when thromboxane syn-
thesis seems to be raised and labile) than it does in
healthy individuals.

Our data strongly indicate that synthesis of
thromboxane is increased and variable for several
days after acute myocardial infarction. This proba-
bly reflects a generalised increase in platelet aggreg-
bility but we cannot rule out the possibility of an
increase in thromboxane synthesis when the coro-
nary vessel becomes occluded. We can only specu-
late on the reasons for a very high synthesis of pros-
taglin, which peaked after maximum creatine kinase
MB release, but this finding could indicate
that most of the increase in endogenous prostacyclin synthesis is the result of tissue necrosis or even repair. The excretion data collected after administration of prostacyclin and aspirin raise several new questions about the prevention of acute myocardial infarction and reduction of infarct size. The actions of aspirin and other thromboxane synthetase inhibitors on the synthesis of thromboxane A_2 under pathological conditions clearly cannot be forecast from results obtained under normal conditions. Studies are continuing.

This study was supported by grants from the Swedish National Association against Heart and Chest Diseases, the Swedish Medical Research Council, and The Upjohn Company.

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