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Glycemic Management in Diabetic Patients Receiving Gentamicin Therapy

(1)Batool Kereem Mohammed, (2)Huda H.Al-Hasnawy
(3)Safaa sahib Naji Sultan, (4)Alya A.Rahi

(1,2_ Department of Medical Microbiology/University of Babylon, Babylon, Iraq)
(3. College of Medicine, University of Babylon, Hilla, Iraq)
(4. Department of Microbiology, College of Medicine, University of Babylon, Hilla, Iraq)

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Abstract :

Gentamicin, an aminoglycoside antibiotic used to treat severe bacterial infections, is not directly associated with hyperglycemia; however, its administration in diabetic patients may indirectly lead to elevated blood glucose levels through several mechanisms. The stress response to infection induces hormonal changes that enhance gluconeogenesis and reduce insulin sensitivity, while gentamicin's known nephrotoxic effects may further compromise renal function in diabetic individuals. Impaired kidney function alters glucose clearance and insulin metabolism, exacerbating hyperglycemia. Additionally, gentamicin may influence insulin secretion by inhibiting calcium-dependent pathways in pancreatic β-cells and disrupting gut microbiota, which in turn elevates branched-chain amino acids linked to insulin resistance. Electrolyte imbalances, particularly hypokalemia, commonly observed during gentamicin therapy, also impair insulin secretion and glucose tolerance. Inflammatory responses to infection and antibiotic-induced endotoxin release may temporarily worsen insulin resistance. Moreover, drug interactions between gentamicin and antidiabetic agents such as metformin pose further challenges, as renal impairment can affect drug clearance and increase toxicity risks. Therefore, effective management of diabetic patients receiving gentamicin necessitates close monitoring of blood glucose and renal function, careful adjustment of antidiabetic therapies, and proactive management of hydration and electrolyte levels. This approach is essential to mitigate the metabolic complications and optimise therapeutic outcomes in this vulnerable population.

Keywords: (Gentamicin, Diabetic, Hyperglycemia , Glucose clearance, Metformin)

Stress Response to Infection

Diabetic patients prescribed gentamicin are often battling severe infections, which can trigger a physiological stress response. This response involves the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and catecholamines, which stimulate hepatic gluconeogenesis and reduce insulin sensitivity—both of which contribute to elevated blood glucose levels[1].In individuals with uncontrolled diabetes, chronic hyperglycemia results in significant metabolic disturbances that impair immune defense mechanisms. Elevated glucose levels not only increase the risk of contracting severe bacterial infections (e.g., *Chlamydophila pneumoniae*, *Haemophilus influenzae*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*) and viral infections (e.g., SARS-CoV-2, Influenza A, Hepatitis B), but also interfere with immune cell functionality. Hyperglycemia alters the immune microenvironment, supports bacterial proliferation by enhancing energy availability, disrupts normal inflammatory responses, and elevates oxidative stress[2].

Furthermore, factors such as high-calorie diets and psychological or physiological stress—both common in diabetic populations—exacerbate hyperglycemia and worsen infection outcomes. Understanding the interplay between infection-induced stress, diabetes, and impaired immunity is essential for optimizing clinical outcomes in diabetic patients undergoing gentamicin therapy[3].

Nephrotoxicity

Gentamicin is well-documented for its nephrotoxic effects, which can be particularly problematic in diabetic patients who often have pre-existing renal impairment due to diabetic nephropathy. When kidney function is further compromised by gentamicin, it may reduce the excretion of glucose and disrupt insulin metabolism—factors that can contribute to elevated blood glucose levels. Interestingly, studies suggest that the diabetic state itself may alter the body's response to gentamicin. Research indicates that hyperglycemia, in the absence of insulin therapy, may offer some protection against gentamicin-induced nephrotoxicity. However, when insulin is administered to restore normoglycemia, this protective effect disappears, implying a role for high blood glucose in modulating drug toxicity[4].Moreover, the combination of diabetes and gentamicin use has been shown to amplify renal damage. Experimental models have demonstrated that diabetic animals treated with gentamicin exhibit greater renal dysfunction and heightened oxidative stress compared to non-diabetic counterparts[5].Gentamicin-induced kidney injury can also disrupt carbohydrate metabolism. Studies have noted that nephrotoxicity is associated with decreased glucose levels in the renal cortex and fasting blood, alongside increased serum lactate, suggesting an imbalance in glucose homeostasis due to impaired renal function[6].Additionally, gentamicin's nephrotoxic effects may intensify insulin resistance and contribute further to glycemic instability. Research involving combined gentamicin and tigecycline treatment has highlighted increased oxidative stress and inflammation as underlying mechanisms of renal injury[7].Although gentamicin does not directly induce hyperglycemia, its impact on kidney function in diabetic patients can significantly affect glucose regulation. This highlights the need for vigilant monitoring of both renal and glycemic parameters during therapy[8].

Drug Interactions

Diabetic patients are frequently prescribed multiple medications to manage blood glucose levels and other comorbidities. Gentamicin may interact with these drugs, potentially influencing their pharmacokinetics and effectiveness. For instance, nephrotoxicity induced by gentamicin can alter the clearance of antidiabetic medications, which may impair glycemic control.Interestingly, certain antidiabetic drugs appear to have nephroprotective properties. Metformin, a widely used agent in type 2 diabetes management, has demonstrated a protective effect against gentamicin-induced kidney injury. In a study conducted by Morales et al., metformin administration completely prevented acute renal failure caused by gentamicin in rats. This benefit was attributed to metformin's ability to reduce oxidative stress and enhance mitochondrial function in renal tissue.Despite its potential renal benefits, metformin use alongside gentamicin requires caution. Since metformin is eliminated unchanged via the kidneys, compromised renal function due to gentamicin may lead to drug accumulation and increase the risk of lactic acidosis or other adverse events. Thus, it is essential to monitor kidney function closely and consider dose adjustments when using both medications concurrently[9].

Altered Insulin Secretion or Sensitivity

Although not extensively documented, certain antibiotics may influence pancreatic β-cell function or insulin sensitivity, potentially impacting blood glucose regulation. In diabetic patients, any alteration in insulin secretion or action can contribute to poor glycemic control. Gentamicin, an aminoglycoside antibiotic, has shown potential effects on insulin dynamics. Experimental studies suggest that gentamicin may inhibit insulin secretion from pancreatic β-cells. Boschero and Delattre found that gentamicin significantly suppressed insulin release from isolated pancreatic islets, both in glucose-stimulated and basal conditions. This inhibition was attributed to gentamicin's interference with calcium influx into β-cells—an essential step in insulin exocytosis. Additionally, gentamicin may impact glucose metabolism indirectly through alterations in gut microbiota. Disruption of the gut microbial community has been linked to elevated circulating levels of branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs), which are known to impair insulin signaling and promote insulin resistance. A study by Sun et al. reported that gentamicin-induced microbiome changes led to increased BCAA levels, which were also associated with altered immune responses. While this research primarily focused on immunity, the observed rise in BCAAs underscores a possible connection between gentamicin use and diminished insulin sensitivity. Together, these findings suggest that gentamicin may contribute to dysregulated glucose metabolism through both direct effects on insulin secretion and indirect effects on insulin action[8].

Hyperglycemia and the Stress Response

In diabetic patients, gentamicin administration may exacerbate hyperglycemia, not only through its nephrotoxic effects but also due to the body's stress response to infection. The stress response involves the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and catecholamines, which promote gluconeogenesis (the production of glucose by the liver) and reduce insulin sensitivity, leading to elevated blood glucose levels. These hormonal changes, combined with the underlying insulin resistance common in diabetic individuals, can further complicate blood glucose control[9].

Gluconeogenesis and Insulin Sensitivity

The body's response to infection, including increased gluconeogenesis, may interfere with normal insulin function. Stress hormones, such as cortisol, drive gluconeogenesis, which increases glucose levels in the bloodstream. Additionally, insulin sensitivity is often reduced during infection, further impairing glucose homeostasis. Diabetic patients, already dealing with insulin resistance, may find it more difficult to manage their blood glucose levels during gentamicin therapy[10].

Insulin Secretion and Pancreatic β-Cells

Research has shown that gentamicin may impact insulin secretion by directly affecting pancreatic β-cells. Gentamicin inhibits calcium influx into these cells, which is essential for insulin release. This inhibition can result in reduced insulin secretion, potentially contributing to hyperglycemia. Furthermore, gentamicin has been observed to disrupt gut microbiota, which plays a role in metabolic regulation. These disruptions lead to elevated levels of branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs), which are associated with insulin resistance and impaired glucose metabolism[11].

Fluid and Electrolyte Imbalance

Gentamicin is known to cause electrolyte disturbances, including hypokalemia (low potassium levels). Potassium plays a crucial role in insulin secretion, and insufficient levels can hinder insulin release, potentially leading to elevated blood glucose levels.Hypokalemia is a well-documented complication of gentamicin therapy. For instance, Shetty et al. reported cases where patients developed hypokalemic metabolic alkalosis and hypomagnesemia in association with gentamicin treatment. Similarly, Yılmaz et al. described a patient who developed an acquired Bartter-like syndrome—a condition marked by hypokalemia, metabolic alkalosis, and hypochloremia—following gentamicin administration. These electrolyte imbalances were resolved after discontinuation of the drug.Low potassium levels are particularly concerning because they impair insulin secretion. Plavinik et al. demonstrated that hypokalemia is linked to glucose intolerance and hyperinsulinemia during diuretic therapy, suggesting that potassium deficiency can reduce insulin release and action. Furthermore, studies have indicated that individuals with low potassium levels secrete less insulin, which increases blood glucose levels and raises the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.Milani et al. conducted a systematic review showing that over 84% of cases involving aminoglycoside therapy, including gentamicin, reported hypokalemia. Their study emphasized that aminoglycosides could induce renal tubular dysfunction, leading to significant electrolyte imbalances.Given the impact of gentamicin-induced hypokalemia on insulin secretion and glucose metabolism, it is crucial for clinicians to monitor electrolyte levels closely during treatment, especially in patients with existing risk factors for glucose regulation disorders. Early identification and management of these imbalances can help mitigate the risk of hyperglycemia and other metabolic complications[11].

Inflammation and Immune Response

The body's inflammatory response to infection and immune system activation can lead to insulin resistance. While gentamicin helps treat the infection, it may initially exacerbate this inflammatory response before resolving it, potentially causing short-term increases in blood glucose levels.Infections provoke an inflammatory response that triggers the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF-α and IL-6. These cytokines can disrupt insulin signaling, contributing to insulin resistance and higher blood glucose levels. Olefsky and Glass have explored how inflammation influences metabolism, shedding light on the link between inflammation and insulin resistance.Though gentamicin is effective in managing infections, its administration may initially intensify the inflammatory response as the immune system reacts to bacterial endotoxins released during bacterial lysis. This temporary escalation in inflammation can worsen insulin resistance, leading to brief increases in blood glucose. However, as the infection resolves and inflammation decreases, insulin sensitivity is likely to improve[12].

Drug Interactions and Antidiabetic Medications

Diabetic patients often take antidiabetic agents, such as metformin, alongside other medications. Gentamicin's nephrotoxic effects may interact with these drugs, influencing their efficacy. Metformin, for example, is primarily excreted by the kidneys. In patients with renal impairment, metformin can accumulate and increase the risk of lactic acidosis. Therefore, careful dose adjustments are necessary when combining metformin with gentamicin. Other antidiabetic medications may also require dose modifications to ensure effective glucose control without exacerbating nephrotoxicity[13].

Management in Diabetic Patients

Close Monitoring: Diabetic patients receiving gentamicin require thorough monitoring of their blood glucose levels, particularly those with pre-existing kidney disease or those on other nephrotoxic medications.Gentamicin, an aminoglycoside antibiotic, is primarily eliminated by the kidneys and is known for its nephrotoxic potential. For diabetic patients, who may already have compromised renal function due to diabetic nephropathy, the risk of nephrotoxicity is elevated. Renal impairment can alter the pharmacokinetics of gentamicin, leading to drug accumulation and an increased risk of toxicity. Diabetes itself is a recognized risk factor for drug-induced nephrotoxicity. Martins et al. highlighted in their study that diabetic rats were more susceptible to gentamicin-induced renal damage, emphasizing the compounded risks for diabetic patients.Clinical reports have also noted cases of acute renal failure in diabetic patients after gentamicin therapy. Anđelić described a case where a long-term diabetic patient developed acute renal insufficiency after a short course of gentamicin, illustrating the increased vulnerability of diabetic individuals to gentamicin's nephrotoxic effects.Therefore, managing diabetic patients on gentamicin therapy requires careful adjustments in antidiabetic medications and vigilant monitoring of renal function. This is crucial to mitigate potential nephrotoxicity and maintain stable glycemic control. Renal impairment can significantly affect the pharmacokinetics of antidiabetic drugs, necessitating dose adjustments to avoid adverse effects. For example, metformin, which is primarily excreted unchanged by the kidneys, may accumulate in patients with reduced renal function, increasing the risk of lactic acidosis.Renal dysfunction increases the risk of lactic acidosis. Consequently, metformin is contraindicated in patients with an estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) below 30 mL/min/1.73 m^2. For patients with an eGFR between 30 and 60 mL/min/1.73 m^2, dose adjustments are advised to prevent adverse effects on renal and metabolic health[14,15,16].

Gentamicin, known for its nephrotoxic potential, can have its effects worsened by factors like dehydration and the concurrent use of other nephrotoxic agents. Ensuring proper hydration is crucial for maintaining renal perfusion and minimizing the risk of nephrotoxicity. Dehydration reduces renal perfusion and decreases the volume of distribution of nephrotoxic drugs like gentamicin, resulting in increased tubular reabsorption and a higher likelihood of renal damage[17,18].

Regular renal function monitoring is essential for patients undergoing gentamicin therapy, particularly those with pre-existing kidney conditions, such as diabetes. Early detection of renal impairment enables timely adjustments in both antibiotic and antidiabetic treatments to prevent further kidney damage and ensure effective glycemic control. Monitoring should include regular assessments of serum creatinine, eGFR, and electrolyte levels to identify any signs of nephrotoxicity promptly[19,20].

Conclusion

Gentamicin itself does not directly cause hyperglycemia; its use in diabetic patients can indirectly lead to elevated blood glucose levels due to factors like infection-related stress, nephrotoxicity, and potential drug interactions. Close monitoring and appropriate management are essential in these patients and are essential for optimizing therapeutic outcomes and minimizing the risks associated with gentamicin therapy. Through proactive management, healthcare providers can mitigate the potential metabolic complications and improve the prognosis for diabetic patients receiving this treatment.

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