Elements of Mediterranean diet improve oxidative status in blood of kidney graft recipients

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(Received 1 June 2004 – Revised 8 November 2004 – Accepted 11 November 2004)

Patients were fully informed as to the study objectives and benefits, and provided written consent prior to enrolment. The study protocol was approved by the Committee on Human Research at the Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland. An intensification of free-radical reactions may contribute to accelerated atherosclerosis in kidney graft recipients. We examined the effect of a Mediterranean-type diet (MD) on the oxidative status of the plasma and erythrocytes of kidney graft recipients. Two patient groups were formed: a study group consuming the MD diet and a control group with a low-fat diet. C-reactive protein levels in plasma, oleic acid C18:1n-9 and linoleic acid C18:2n-6 concentrations in triacylglycerols were determined. To determine the oxidative status, we measured the concentrations of α-tocopherol in plasma, the content of thiobarbituric acid-reactive species (TBARS) in plasma and erythrocytes, and the activities of superoxide dismutase, catalase and glutathione peroxidase in erythrocytes. In the MD group, the activities of erythrocyte enzymes changed significantly: those of superoxide dismutase increased (P<0.001 after 6 months), catalase decreased (P<0.001 after 6 months) and glutathione peroxidase decreased (P<0.05 after 2 months). The oleic acid content of triacylglycerols was increased (P<0.006) whereas that of linoleic acid was decreased (P<0.00005), α-tocopherol levels remaining unchanged. TBARS in plasma were decreased after 6 months of MD (P<0.05). No significant correlations were observed between TBARS, oleic acid, linoleic acid and α-tocopherol levels in plasma. MD appears to protect the erythrocytes against the action of free radicals, as reflected in the modified activities of some enzymes regulating the oxidative status of these blood cells.

Mediterranean diet: Kidney: Transplantation: Superoxide dismutase: Catalase: Glutathione peroxidase: Oleic acid: Linoleic acid: C-reactive protein: α-Tocopherol

Accelerated atherosclerosis caused by lipid disorders associated with immunosuppressive therapy remains a major problem compromising survival in transplant recipients (Berman et al. 2003). Hyperlipaemia enhances lipid peroxidation and activates free-radical reactions (Lindholm et al. 1995; Berman et al. 2003). Protection against the action of free radicals in plasma and erythrocytes is provided by antioxidants of the non-enzymatic system (e.g. vitamin E, GSH) and ‘antioxidant’ enzymes such as superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase and glutathione peroxidase (GPx) (Debray, 1980).

Vitamin E is one of the most important and efficient antioxidants in plasma. Thanks to its reductive properties, it inhibits the oxidation of polyunsaturated fatty acids protecting cells (e.g. erythrocytes) against free-radical lesions (Debray, 1980). GSH is the main hydrophilic antioxidant of erythrocytes, overwhelmingly present in its reduced form with just 0·2 % GSSG. GSSG is the main hydrophilic antioxidant of erythrocytes, overwhelmingly present in its reduced form with just 0·2 % GSSG. GSSG is neutralised at high concentrations by catalase (Mates et al. 1999) and at low concentrations by GPx (Mezzetti et al. 1990).

A functioning renal graft contributes to the normalisation of peroxidation reactions in plasma (Reimold, 1980). This beneficial outcome can be strengthened through dietary interventions aimed at delivering antioxidants to the patient (Assmann et al. 1997). The Mediterranean diet (MD) has long been recommended for its antiatherosclerotic properties (Expert Panel, 1993). Among effects of the MD is a suppression of lipoprotein peroxidation (Parthasarathy et al. 1990) and a normalisation of endothelial (Perez-Jimenez et al. 1999; Carluccio et al. 2003) and platelet (Larsen et al. 1999; Williams, 2001) function. Kidney graft recipients consuming the MD have decreased plasma concentrations of triacylglycerols (TG), total cholesterol and LDL (Barbagallo et al. 1999).

Elevated plasma levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a recognised marker of inflammation, correlate with accelerated atherosclerosis and increased risk of death due to stroke (Illiingworth, 1999; Ford & Giles, 2002).

The aim of this work was to determine the effect of simple MD principles on the rate of inflammatory reactions (as measured by CRP levels in plasma) and oxidative status in the plasma and erythrocytes of kidney graft recipients.

Abbreviations: CRP, C-reactive protein; GPx, glutathione peroxidase; MD, Mediterranean diet; SOD, superoxide dismutase; TBARS, thiobarbituric acid-reactive species; TG, triacylglycerols.

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Material and methods

Patient data
A low-fat diet is standard therapy for graft recipients. Our own patients started a low-fat diet at the time of grafting or before transplantation (dialysed patients). Kidney graft recipients with stable graft function, non-smokers, were randomly assigned to two groups: the study and control groups. Patients in the study group had been on a low-fat diet for 29·1 (0–32) months before the study, whereas patients from the control group had been on a low-fat diet for 29·5 (1–38) months before the study. In this study, the diet was changed only for the study (MD) group, the control group patients continuing the low-fat diet.

A qualified dietician instructed patients on either the MD or the low-fat diet. The study group consisted of 21 patients whose diet complied with MD principles in the form of 4-week, all-day menus. The control group included sixteen patients on a low-fat diet, isocaloric with the study diet (isocaloric intake being determined by estimation of kcal/kg and then verified by dietary record and computer software). Patients were asked to take home and complete a 24 h diet diary. The diet diary booklet contained menus, pages to record foods, and photographs of food that depicted portion choices for a common food item. The dietician indicated that the patient should record the food brand and portion size. The amounts consumed were recorded in household units, by volume or by measuring with a ruler. Each subject was interviewed about their dietary pattern in the previous month. Nutrient analyses were carried out using the corresponding Polish food table (Kuha-nowicz et al. 2001) and the nutrient database developed in Poland (Dietetyk, Jumar, Poland). In addition, dietary compliance was assessed with the chromatographic measurement of oleic C18:1n-9 and linoleic acid C18:2n-6 content in plasma TG.

Patients continued their immunosuppressive (cyclosporin, prednisone, azathioprine) and hypotensive (diuretics, calcium channel blockers, selective inhibitors of angiotensin I convertase) regimens. No antilipaemics were administered, either prior to or during the study. Measurements were made before and after 1, 2 and 6 months of the experiment. Details of the patients are presented in Table 1.

Main assumptions concerning diet
Daily energy intakes were 10 460 kJ (2500 kcal) for men and 8368 kJ (2000 kcal) for women in the study and control group. In the study group, daily energy intake was attributed as follows: 47 % carbohydrates, 38 % fatty acids (including 10 % saturated, 22 % monounsaturated and 6 % polyunsaturated species) and 15 % protein (Table 2). Cholesterol and fibre supply was 165 (SD 17) mg/d and 47 (SD 9) g/d respectively. The dominating fatty acid was oleic acid from olive oil and erucic acid-poor rapeseed oil. Patients consumed 30 ml cold-pressed olive oil per day (fresh salads) and prepared their cooked meals exclusively with rapeseed oil. Patients consumed approximately 30 g daily of products rich in α-tocopherol and α-linolenic acid C18:3n-3 (grains, flax-seed, nuts). The carbohydrate component contained less glucose (low glycaemic index). Allowable products included cereals, pulses, wholemeal bread, vegetables (fresh and cooked), oat flakes (cooked) and spaghetti. The patients were advised to consume fresh vegetables with every meal. The daily animal protein consumption was 25–50 g for men and 23–46 g for women, representing one-third of the total protein. No additional vitamin supplementation was offered.

In the control group, daily energy intake was attributed as follows: 57 % carbohydrates, 26 % fatty acids and 17 % protein (Table 2). Cholesterol and fibre supply was 257 (SD 15) mg/d and 24 (SD 13) g/d respectively. The carbohydrate component was poor in cellulose and rich in starch (white bread, potatoes, rice). The fat content was lower than in the study group, with polyunsaturated (mainly C18:2n-6) fats dominating. Questionnaires revealed that butter and sunflower oil were the main source of fat in this group. Daily animal protein consumption was higher than in the study group (approximately 70 g for men and 50 g for women), whereas the consumption of fruit and fresh vegetables was lower. The diet was not supplemented with vitamins.

Plasma lipids
Total, LDL and HDL cholesterol fractions, and TG, were measured in fasting plasma with commercial test kits (bio-Merieux, Marcy l’Etoile, France).

Fluorometric determination of thiobarbituric acid-reactive substances in plasma and erythrocytes
The method for measuring thiobarbituric acid-reactive substances (TBARS) was based on the reaction between malondialdehyde and thiobarbituric acid (Wasowicz et al. 1993). The coloured complex was measured with a spectrofluorometer (LS 50 B; Perkin-Elmer Wellesley, MA, USA).

Table 1. Clinical data of patients at the time of enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of patients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-graft dialysis history (months)</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0–32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time from grafting to enrolment (months)</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>2–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creatinine in serum (mg/dl)</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure (mmHg)</td>
<td>134.7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diastolic blood pressure (mmHg)</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI (kg/m²)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunosuppressive and hypotensive treatment</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 6 females, 15 males.
† 6 females, 10 males.
C-reactive protein test (highly sensitive)

The ELISA automated microparticle enzyme immunoassay test kit (Euroimmun, Lubeck, Germany), providing a quantitative in vitro assay for highly sensitive CRP, was used. Measurements were carried out in EDTA-anticoagulated plasma.

Chromatography of triacylglycerols and fatty acids

Plasma (1 ml) was extracted according to the method of Folch et al. (1957). Aliquots were separated on TLC plates (Merck, Hauar, Germany), and the TG band was scraped off, saponified with methano-

nolic KOH and methylated in the presence of BF₃ (15 min, 65°C). Fatty acid methyl esters were extracted with hexane, concentrated under N₂ and injected into a gas chromatograph (8500; Perkin-

Elmer) equipped with a 30 m capillary column (RTX 5; Restek, Bellefonte PA, USA). Chromatographic conditions were: injector temperature 220°C, detector temperature 260°C, oven temperature 50–245°C, ramp rate was 4°C/min and oven temperature was then held at 245°C for 5 min. Fatty acids were identified by comparing their retention times with those of high-purity standards (Sigma-Aldrich).

Determination of α-tocopherol in plasma

Concentrations of α-tocopherol were measured using HPLC. Blood was anticoagulated with EDTA and centrifuged (850 g, 10 min) at 4°C. Plasma was stored at –80°C in the dark in plastic tubes until assayed. Volumes of 250 μl plasma were mixed with 250 μl ethanol containing 0.5 mg/l trans-β-apo-8'-carotenal (internal standard) and 100 mg/l di-tet-butyl-4-methylphenol (antioxidant) and vortexed for 30 s. Next, 1 ml hexane was added, and the mixture was vortexed for 2 min (Epler et al. 1993). Following centrifugation (1000 g, 0°C, 5 min), 800 μl of the upper layer was transferred to a glass tube and evaporated to dryness under N₂. The sediment was dissolved in 150 μl ethanol with intense vortexing for 30 s. The temperature at all stages was 0°C, and samples were protected from light.

Reversed phase HPLC was carried out with an HP1050 chromatograph (Hewlett-Packard; now Agilent PaloAlto, CA, USA) equipped with a UV/VIS variable wavelength detector and ther-

mostatated column compartment. A 201TPS4 (250 X 4.6 mm) column and a 201GK54 precolumn (Vydac, Warsaw, Poland, USA) were mounted. Tocopherols were separated isocratically at 21°C. The mobile phase was methanol–tetrahydrofuran–acetonitrile (88:5:7.5:5.0 v/v/v) flowing at 1.5 ml/min. All reagents were of HPLC-grade purity (LiChrosolv; Merck). The detection of α-tocopherol was achieved at 295 nm, whereas the internal standard was detected at 450 nm. The sample volume was 20 μl and the time between runs 10 min. Calibration was performed with an ethanolic solution of α-tocopherol (Fluka; Sigma-Aldrich, Poznan, Poland) added instead of ethanol.

Determination of activities of superoxide dismutase E.C. 1.11.1.1, catalase E.C. 1.11.1.6 and glutathione peroxidase E.C. 1.11.1.9

Heparinised blood (5 ml) samples were collected from each patient. Blood was centrifuged at 804 g for 10 min, the supernatant was discarded, and the erythrocyte pellet was rinsed three times in PBS pH 7.4. Erythrocytes were suspended in deio-

nised water (200 μl erythrocytes + 100 μl water) and rapidly frozen to –80°C. Haemolysates from thawed erythrocytes were adjusted to 5 g/dl Hb and used for enzyme determinations. All reagents for spectrophotometric measurements were from Sigma-Aldrich.

SOD activity was determined with a spectrophotometric method (Mizsa & Fridovich, 1972). The enzyme was extracted from the haemolysate with chloroform–ethanol (3.5 v/v%) and intense shaking for 5 min. The extract was centrifuged (3200 g, 10 min, 4°C). Supernatant (50 μl) was added to 2.85 ml bicarbon-

ate buffer (0.05 M, pH 10.2) containing 100 μl adrenaline (16.5 mg in 0.1 M HCl). The absorbance change during 10 min was measured with a UV/VIS Lambda 40P (Perkin-Elmer) spectrophotometer at 320 nm and 30°C against a blank containing the buffer and SOD extract only.

Catalase activity was determined with the method of Aebi (1984). Immediately prior to measurement, the haemolysate was diluted 1:500 with phosphate buffer (50 mM, pH 7.0). The removal of H₂O₂ by catalase from samples containing 2 ml diluted haemolysate and 1 ml H₂O₂ (30 mM) was assessed, against a blank containing haemolysate and 1 ml buffer, by measuring the change in absorbance over 30 s. Measurements were made at 240 nm and 20°C. Catalase activity was expressed as k/gHb, where k is first-order reaction rate constant.

GPX activity was determined according to Wendel (1981). Haemolysates (3 mg Hb/ml) were supplemented with the trans-

forming reagent (4.5 mM KCN and 0.45 mM K₂[Fe(CN)₆]). Following an incubation of 5 min at room temperature, 0.5 ml haemolysate was added to the reaction solution containing phos-

phate buffer (50 mM, pH 7.0), glutathione reductase (0.30/ml), GSH (10 mM) and NADPH (2.5 mM) and incubated for 10 min at 37°C. The reaction was started with tert-buthyl hydroperoxide (t-BOOH) (12 mM), and the linear decrease in NADPH concent-

ration over 4 min was followed by measuring the change in absorbance against a blank free of NADPH. Measurements were carried out at 340 nm and 37°C.

Measurement of glutathione concentration in erythrocyte suspension

The concentration of GSH was measured spectrophotometrically (Beutler et al. 1963). A volume of 100 μl washed frozen erythro-

cytes in suspension were added to 900 μl distilled water. The resulting haemolysate was precipitated by vortexing with a solu-

tion containing metaphosphoric acid, EDTA and NaCl. Centrifug-

ation (3214 g, 4°C, 10 min) followed, and phosphate buffer (0.3 M, pH 7.5) containing dithio-bis-2-nitrobenzene was added to the supernatant. Extinction of the product formed by aithio-


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### Table 2. Basic features of the diet in the study and control groups (Mean values and standard deviations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meals per day</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary protein content (%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary carbohydrate content (%)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary fat content (%)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrate content (g/d)</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starch consumption (g/d)</td>
<td>204.3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibre consumption (g/d)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol consumption (mg/d)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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bis-2-nitrobenzene and GSH proportionally to GSH concentration was measured at 412 nm and 25°C.

**Statistics**

As the distribution in most cases deviated from normal (Shapiro–Wilk test), non-parametric tests were used. Significance was first checked with Friedmann’s ANOVA, and significant results were next subjected to the Wilcoxon matched-pairs test. Groups were compared with the Mann–Whitney U test. Correlations were checked with Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.

**Results**

Plasma concentrations of lipids (total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol and TG) in the study and control groups are shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the beginning</td>
<td>After 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cholesterol (mg/dl)</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDL cholesterol (mg/dl)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDL cholesterol (mg/dl)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triacylglycerols (mg/dl)</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant difference in relation to starting value (Wilcoxon’s test) \(P<0.05\).
† Significant difference in relation to starting value (Wilcoxon’s test) \(P<0.0007\).

Statistics as the distribution in most cases deviated from normal (Shapiro–Wilk test), non-parametric tests were used. Significance was first checked with Friedmann’s ANOVA, and significant results were next subjected to the Wilcoxon matched-pairs test. Groups were compared with the Mann–Whitney U test. Correlations were checked with Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.

**Results**

Plasma concentrations of lipids (total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol and TG) in the study and control groups are shown in Table 3.

Total cholesterol levels in the study group decreased from 230 mg/dl to 210 mg/dl during the study \(P<0.05\), whereas in the control group cholesterol levels remained unchanged. No significant differences in LDL and HDL cholesterol levels were noted over time or between groups. A decline in the TG level was observed in the study group (from 194 mg/dl to 152 mg/dl; \(P<0.0007\)). In the control group, TG levels did not change.

Concentrations of CRP in graft recipients are presented in Table 4. No statistically significant changes induced by the diet or differences between groups of patients were revealed.

The content of oleic and linoleic acid in plasma triacylglycerols of both groups is also presented in Table 4. The concentration of oleic acid increased in the study group during the experiment \(P<0.006\) after 1, 2 and 6 months; Table 4), whereas no statistically significant changes were noted in the control group. Significant differences between both groups in the concentration of oleic acid appeared after 1 month of the diet and persisted thereafter \(P<0.00005\) after 6 months; Table 4). The linoleic acid content in the triacylglycerols of the study group fell during the experiment. In contrast, a significant increase was noted in the controls (Table 4). The MD produced a statistically significant difference in the content of linoleic acid between the study and control groups \(P<0.00005\) after 6 months).

The plasma concentration of TBARS prior to the experiment was similar in both groups. In the study group, concentrations after 6 months of the diet approached the values seen in healthy individuals (0.78 μmol/l; E. Stachowska et al. unpublished results). In the control group, TBARS increased, and the group ended the experiment with significantly higher concentrations than the study group \(P<0.05\); Table 4).

Rising concentrations of oleic acid and decreasing concentrations of linoleic acid in TG in the study group did not correlate with TBARS levels in the plasma at any point during the experiment. No correlation was ascertained in the control group either.

No statistically significant changes or differences between groups in \(\alpha\)-tocopherol plasma concentrations and concentration normalised to blood lipids (Table 5) were observed. Levels of \(\alpha\)-tocopherol did not correlate with TBARS in either group of patients.

Significant changes in the activities of antioxidant enzymes in the erythrocytes were observed (Table 6). SOD activity increased in both groups. In the study group, the change was statistically significant after 2 \(P<0.05\); n 18) and 6 \(P<0.001\); n 19) months of the diet. In the control group, the change was significant after 6 months \(P<0.01\); n 11). Values were higher in the study (S) than the control (C) groups after 1 month \(P<0.05\); n S 20, n C 15; Mann–Whitney U-test), and this discrepancy remained noticeable until the end of the experiment \(P<0.01\); n S 19, n C 11). Cat- alase activity changed only in the study group, revealing lower values after 6 months of the diet \(P<0.001\); n17). GPx activity was decreased in the study group after 1 \(P<0.05\); n 17) and 2 \(P<0.05\); n 17) months of the diet. No statistically significant differences were noted after 6 months (n 16). In the control group, no significant changes in GPx activity were seen throughout the experiment (Table 6). No statistically significant differences were noted in the GSH content of erythrocytes was noted between both groups (Table 6). We believe that this finding can be attributed to the use of sedimented frozen erythrocytes (differences could be revealed by studying fresh erythrocytes). However, this erythrocyte material also served to determine activities of GPx and the remaining enzymes.

The TBARS content of the erythrocytes did not exhibit any significant fluctuations in either group.

No significant correlations between \(\alpha\)-tocopherol concentration in plasma and SOD or catalase activities in the erythrocytes of either group were seen. Nevertheless, a positive correlation of \(\alpha\)-tocopherol with GPx activity was noted when the groups were pooled (Table 7). An even stronger correlation was revealed between GPx activity and the ratio of \(\alpha\)-tocopherol to TG (in both groups), reflecting the content of \(\alpha\)-tocopherol in the TG fraction (Table 7). The same correlation was observed in the pooled groups after 2 months of the experiment. No such correlation could be seen in the case of SOD and catalase.

**Table 3.** Patient data (Mean values and standard deviations) including total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, LDL cholesterol and triacylglycerol concentrations in plasma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the beginning</td>
<td>After 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cholesterol (mg/dl)</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDL cholesterol (mg/dl)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triacylglycerols (mg/dl)</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Changes in the concentrations of C-reactive protein, oleic acid, linoleic acid and thiobarbituric acid-reactive species (TBARS) in the plasma of kidney graft recipients
(Mean values and standard deviations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time (months)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-reactive protein (mg/l)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oleic acid in triacylglycerols (µg/ml serum)</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linoleic acid in triacylglycerols (µg/ml serum)</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBARS (µmol/l)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically significant differences (Wilcoxon's test) within groups in comparison to starting values: *P<0.05; ‡P<0.01; §P<0.001.
Statistically significant differences (Mann–Whitney U-test) between groups at given time points: ¶P<0.05; ¶P<0.01; **P<0.001.

Table 5. α-Tocopherol concentration in plasma normalised to blood lipids concentration
(Arithmetic means ± s.d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time (months)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α-Tocopherol concentration (mg/l)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α-Tocopherol/TH (mg/mg)</td>
<td>0.0067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(TH + TG) (mg/mg)</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDL Ch (mg/mg)</td>
<td>0.0091</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TG, triacylglycerol; TH, total cholesterol; LDL, LDL cholesterol.
No statistically significant differences were noted between groups during the study.
Discussion

Accelerated atherosclerosis caused by dyslipaemia and hypercholesterolaemia following organ transplantation is one of the factors adversely affecting graft survival (Barbagallo et al. 1999; Salen et al. 1999). The MD, rich in olive oil, natural cereals, vegetables and fruits (Visoli et al. 1998), has emerged as an interesting possibility for reducing atherosclerotic risk. Olive oil as the chief source of fat protects the vasculature against atherogenesis, exerts an antioxidant action and suppresses the release of arachidonic acid from the lipid constituents of cell membranes (Expert Panel, 1993). In countries of the Mediterranean basin notable for their consumption of olive oil, the rate of atherosclerosis is the lowest in Europe (Expert Panel, 1993).

CRP is a recognised marker of inflammation. Levels of CRP are elevated in patients with atherosclerosis (Ford & Giles, 2002). Several large-scale prospective studies have demonstrated that high-sensitivity CRP is a strong independent predictor of future myocardial infarction and stroke among healthy subjects (Ridker, 2001). Elevated CRP levels in plasma correlate with an increased risk of death due to stroke. With levels of CRP above 5.5 mg/l, the risk is 1.67 higher than at levels below 2.1 mg/l; moreover, this is independent of other risk factors (Ridker, 2001; Ford & Giles, 2002). In our study, however, CRP levels in plasma were not affected by the diet (see Table 4).

It is known from the literature that plasma lipoproteins are protected against oxidative stress. Protection is afforded by three components. Polyphenols from the diet (e.g. from cold-pressed olive oil) and monounsaturated fatty acids (including oleic acid) incorporated into the lipoprotein structure effectively suppress oxidative modifications (Caruso et al. 1999; Ford & Giles, 2002). Rising levels of oleic acid in the study group (see Table 4) were accompanied by lower concentrations of TBARS, reflecting suppressed peroxidation. In the control group oleic acid levels did not increase and, consequently, significantly higher TBARS levels were noted in this group at the end of the experiment. No significant correlations could be revealed between TBARS, oleic acid, linoleic acid and α-tocopherol levels when Spearman’s rank coefficients were applied (data not shown). This finding suggests that the key role in protecting lipoproteins against peroxidation is played by some factors present in the MD other than oleic acid or α-tocopherol. Such a role has been ascribed by several authors to polyphenols con-

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Table 6. Changes in the activities of antioxidative enzymes, GSH and thiobarbituric acid-reactive species (TBARS) in the erythrocytes of kidney graft recipients (Arithmetic means ± S.D.)
tained, for example in cold-pressed olive oil (Caruso et al. 1999; Galli & Visioli, 1999).

The cardioprotective properties of the diet largely depend on the right profile (quantitative and qualitative) of fatty acids (Lichtenstein, 1997; Kris-Etherton, 1999; Kris-Etherton et al. 2001), which in turn determines which fatty acids will be incorporated into plasma lipoproteins. The findings of de Lorgeril et al. (1994, 1999) led to the hypothesis that the content of oleic (C18: 1n-9), linoleic (C18: 2n-6) and α-linolenic (C18: 3n-3) acid in cholesterol esters is important for reducing mortality. Higher concentrations of oleic acids, much lower concentrations of linoleic acid and unexpectedly high concentrations of α-linolenic acid have been disclosed in inhabitants of Crete (which has the lowest mortality from coronary heart disease in Europe) compared with other European cohorts (Sandk et al. 1993).

We focused attention on the content of oleic and linoleic acids in plasma. The content of linoleic acid in TG demonstrated a down-ward course in the study group, unlike the control group, in which a slight increase was seen. Although there was no correlation between the reduced content of linoleic acid and the inhibition of plasma peroxidation processes (as reflected by TBARS levels), decreased plasma levels of linoleic acid may act as a cardioprotective factor due to the reduced availability of this acid for the synthesis of n-6 eicosanoids (Ulbricht & Southagante, 1991).

We observed that patients on the MD demonstrated increased activities of SOD, a key antioxidant enzyme in the erythrocyte. This blood cell is equipped with a robust antioxidant system consisting of antioxidant enzymes like SOD, catalase and GPx with relatively high activities, as well as non-enzyme components (GSH, α-tocopherol, carotenoids; Smith & Berkseth, 1990; Siems et al. 2000). GSH concentrations are known to rise sharply after kidney grafting compared with controls and preoperative values (Hussain et al. 1995).

We used TBARS in the plasma and erythrocytes as a marker of oxidative stress. Although TBARS in erythrocytes did not change significantly in either group throughout the study (see Table 6), TBARS in plasma was significantly reduced in the MD group after 6 months of the diet (see Table 4).

However, we failed to show a reduction in free-radical reactions in the erythrocytes, although we have no doubt that this reduction took place in the plasma of MD patients. This finding allowed us to conclude that the MD may protect against the generation of free radicals in kidney graft recipients.

The activities of SOD, catalase and GPx changed during the experiment (see Table 6). The rising activity of superoxide dismu-tase may reflect a lower rate of free-radical reactions in the erythrocyte. It is believed that elevated SOD activity reflects a sparing effect on that enzyme when free radical reactions have been quenched (Vanella et al. 1983; Paul et al. 1993; Chen et al. 1997). SOD catalyses the dismutation of O$_2^-$ to H$_2$O$_2$ and O$_2$. A decreased activity of SOD following haemodialysis is due to consumption of the enzyme involved in the breakdown of O$_2$ and in other reactions with reactive oxygen species such as OH* and H$_2$O$_2$ (D’Haese & DeBroe, 1996).

The other two enzymes, catalase and GPx, catalyse the breakdown of H$_2$O$_2$ produced by SOD. Unlike the situation in the control group, we observed significantly decreased activities of catalase (after 6 months of the diet) and GPx in the study group. Presumably, the MD contributed to a reduction in the production of H$_2$O$_2$ and in this way suppressed both enzymes for which H$_2$O$_2$ serves as a substrate.

Changes in SOD activities observed in both groups may be attributed to environmental factors. Our study was carried out during summer and early autumn when the availability of fruits and vegetables may favour an improvement in the oxidative status of the plasma in study and control patients alike. It is worth mentioning that it was only the activity of SOD that changed in control patients, with no affect on the other two antioxidative enzymes: catalase and GPx.

It is worth noting the positive correlation between the activity of GPx and the plasma concentration of α-tocopherol. According to the literature (Sneddon et al. 2003), α-tocopherol protects the cellular membrane of the erythrocyte and prevents haemolysis. This correlation revealed by us irrespective of the diet may reflect a protective function of α-tocopherol as a factor that stabilises the environment of GPx (Table 7).

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by research grant No. 130-649 from the Pomeranian Medical University, Szczecin, Poland.

References


