

DOCTORAL THESIS

Metabolomics study of regulatory effects of exercise training on db/db type 2 diabetic mice

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ABSTRACT

Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is mainly caused by genetic modifications and inappropriate life styles. The complexity of T2DM has brought us challenges for a comprehensive understanding of altered metabolic pathways that contributing to the development of T2DM. Therefore, a comprehensive metabolic analysis is needed. To date, taking regular exercise is a common and effective therapeutic way known to antagonize the metabolic disorders of T2DM. However, the regulatory effects of exercise on T2DM or T2DM-induced complications have not been clearly characterized.

We investigated the effect of physical activity on biochemical changes in diabetic *db/db* mice in plasma, urine, skeletal muscle, kidney and liver samples. Based on the techniques of liquid chromatography-high resolution Orbitrap mass spectrometry (LC-MS) and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS), untargeted and targeted metabolomics studies were developed to delineate metabolic signatures in various kinds of biofluid and tissue samples. Targeted quantification methods on acylcarnitines and acyl-CoA were developed. Untargeted metabolomics analysis by GC-MS and LC-MS were also developed to draw a more comprehensive view of the metabolic changes in response to T2DM and exercise on *db/db* diabetic mice. The transcript expressions of mRNA in pathways of interest were measured to confirm the hypothesis.

Firstly, untargeted metabolomics study was carried on plasma samples to give a general view of exercise effect on *db/m+* control and *db/db* diabetic mice. A total of 24 differential metabolites were identified contributing to the metabolic differentiation of the 2 types of mice. The levels of three biomarkers, including creatine, uridine and lysine, were substantially reversed by exercise on *db/db* mice. Notably, the level of palmitoylcarnitine and pantothenic acid, which participate in FAO, were significantly

increased by exercise on *db/db* mice rather than on *db/m+* mice. The findings indicated that *db/db* diabetic mice may be more susceptible to exercise for energy expenditure. The results demonstrated that physical activity might have the ability to mitigate insulin resistance in T2DM mice through improving FAO and eliminating overloaded intermediate which contribute to insulin resistance.

Based on the findings from plasma sample, we noticed that acylcarnitines that play an important role in fatty acid β -oxidation (FAO) have been substantially changed between *db/m+* and *db/db* mice. In order to acquire more information of the disturbance of this pathway, a targeted quantification method of acylcarnitines was developed. Acylcarnitines exert a variety of biological functions depending on the differences in lengths, saturation levels and conjugation groups, which to a great extent contributes to the challenges of acylcarnitines quantifications due to the various kinds of isomers. Here, we describe a novel method by using high resolution parallel reaction monitoring (PRM) on LC-MS platform. Both reversed-phase and normal-phase columns were used in order to get accurate, reliable, widespread quantification of acylcarnitines, without tedious sample preparation procedure. The method provided the most comprehensive acylcarnitine profile with high resolution MS and MS/MS confirmation to date. A total of 117 acylcarnitines were detected from plasma and urine samples. The application of targeted profiling of acylcarnitines in *db/m+* control and *db/db* diabetic mice showed incomplete amino acid and fatty acid oxidation in diabetic mice. Interestingly, the reduction of medium odd-numbered chain acylcarnitines in urine samples was firstly observed between *db/m+* and *db/db* mice. The high resolution PRM method allowed monitoring the widespread metabolic changes of the acylcarnitines in response to stimuli. Besides, the accurate MS and MS/MS spectra data

of the 117 acylcarnitines could be used as mass spectrometric resources for the identification of acylcarnitines.

Skeletal muscle is the major tissue that responsible for insulin sensitivity. Any changes in skeletal muscle mass, responsiveness to hormones or metabolic rate could substantially influence the overall homeostasis of energy in the body. In Chapter 4, untargeted metabolomics analysis was performed to investigate the effect of regular exercise on *db/db* mice in skeletal muscle. Both LC-MS and GC-MS were carried out to monitor a wide range of regulated metabolites. Ninety-five metabolites were identified which contribute to the discrimination of *db/m+* control and *db/db* diabetic mice. The regulatory effects of exercise on these metabolites were mainly associated with attenuating the levels of long-chain fatty acids (C14 to C18) and medium- to long-chain acylcarnitines (C12 to C18), indicating that exercise might play a positive role in inhibiting the accumulation of excessive lipids, which contributed to insulin resistance. In addition, uric acid that is a risk factor for inflammation, cardiovascular complications, and fatty liver in diabetic patients, together with its intermediates (such as inosinic acid, hypoxanthine, *etc.*) were also substantially down regulated after exercise, indicating that exercise might also be protective against hyperuricemia related risks in T2DM. These findings revealed that regular exercise played a positive role in improving the efficiency of lipid metabolism and meanwhile enhancing uric acid clearance to prevent lipid accumulation in skeletal muscle, which might contribute to improved body fitness and body muscle composition.

In addition, the regulatory effect of exercise on diabetic nephropathy, a major complication of T2DM recognized to cause severe morbidity and mortality in diabetic patients, was also investigated in chapter 5. Untargeted and targeted metabolomics studies based on GC-MS and LC-MS were performed. The results demonstrated that

exercise exhibited beneficial effect in reducing hyperlipidemia, expression levels of inflammatory markers (TNF α , IL-6 and COX2) and fibrosis markers (Collagen 1), and alleviated DN induced mesangial expansion in kidneys of diabetic mice. The results of metabolic changes in kidney of DN mice revealed that the accumulation of acyl-CoA, phospholipids and hydroxylated acylcarnitines were substantially ameliorated by exercise, and the reduction of important enzymes *CTP1 α* and *Acadl* in FAO were partially reversed. In addition, branched-chain amino acids (BCAA) metabolism that positively related to inflammation (TNF α) was down-regulated in diabetic mice. However, exercise up-regulated BCAA catabolism via reducing the level of leucine and increasing the expression of *Acad8*, *Bcat2*, *Hibch* and *Hmgcl* in this pathway. Furthermore, the accumulation of uric acid, which contributes to inflammation and tubulointerstitial fibrosis in kidney disease, together with its six precursors (guanosine, succinyladenosine, inosine, guanine and xanthine) were substantially reduced. The above results demonstrated that exercise might play beneficial effect in alleviating lipotoxicity through improving FAO efficiency in diabetic kidneys. In addition, exercise also ameliorated diabetic induced inflammation and fibrosis via promoting BCAA catabolism and accelerated the elimination of uric acid.

Together, mass spectrometry-based metabolomics study is a powerful tool to investigate the regulatory effect of exercise on complex metabolic diseases. The obtained results in this study may provide informative insights into the underlying the mechanism of exercise on T2DM and T2DM-induced complications.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables.....	xviii
List of Abbreviations	xix
Chapter 1 General Introduction.....	1
1.1 Type 2 diabetes mellitus	1
1.1.1 Diabetes mellitus.....	1
1.1.2 Prevalence and social burden caused by T2DM	2
1.1.3 T2DM and physical activity.....	4
1.2 Metabolomics technology.....	5
1.2.1 Metabolomics: building a bridge from biochemistry to guidance of human health.....	5
1.2.2 Analysis platform of metabolomics technology	7
1.2.3 Untargeted metabolomics	11
1.2.4 Targeted metabolomics	14
1.2.5 Application of metabolomics in studying T2DM	17
1.3 Objectives	19

Chapter 2 Metabolomics study of regulatory effects of regular exercise on *db/db*

mice in plasma.....	21
2.1 Introduction.....	21
2.2 Experiment.....	23
2.2.1 Chemicals and materials	23
2.2.2 Animal experiments	23
2.2.3 Sample preparation	24
2.2.4 Instrument analysis	25
2.2.5 Quality control	26
2.2.6 Data processing and multivariate statistical analysis.....	27
2.3 Results.....	27
2.3.1 Exercise performance of mice on Pharmacological parameters	27
2.3.2 Method validation	29
2.3.3 Multivariate statistical profiling analysis.....	29
2.3.4 Identification of metabolites in response to T2DM and exercise training.....	30
2.4 Discussion.....	36
2.4.1 Regulatory effect of exercise on creatine may reveal good effect on diabetes induced dysfunction of energy metabolism	37
2.4.2 Regulatory effect of exercise on uridine may indicate positive effect on promoted insulin sensitivity	38
2.4.3 Exercise effect on fatty acid metabolism pathway.....	39
2.5 Summary of this chapter	43

Chapter 3 Comprehensive analysis of acylcarnitine species in <i>db/db</i> mouse using a novel method of high resolution parallel reaction monitoring reveals widespread metabolic dysfunction induced by diabetes	45
3.1 Introduction.....	45
3.2 Material and methods	47
3.2.1 Reagents	47
3.2.2 Animal experiments and sample collection	48
3.2.3 Sample preparation and metabolites extraction	49
3.2.4 Liquid chromatography coupled with Orbitrap mass spectrometry.....	49
3.2.5 Liquid chromatography coupled with triple quadruple mass spectrometry....	50
3.2.6 Quantification and method validation.....	52
3.2.7 Peak extraction	52
3.2.8 Statistical analysis	54
3.3 Results.....	55
3.3.1 Simultaneous detection of acylcarnitines.....	55
3.3.2 Quantification of acylcarnitines in biological samples	79
3.3.3 Assessment of sample stability	79
3.3.4 Method validation	80
3.3.5 Targeted profiling of acylcarnitines in response to type 2 diabetes in mice in plasma and urine samples	81
3.4 Discussion.....	86
3.4.1 Identification of 117 acylcarnitines in plasma and urine samples	86
3.4.2 Satisfactory reliability and quantification ability of this method.....	88

3.4.3 Measurement of acylcarnitines in <i>db/db</i> mice in plasma and urine samples reveals substantial disturbed metabolic disorders	88
3.5 Chapter summary	94
Chapter 4 Metabolomics study on <i>db/db</i> diabetic mice in skeletal muscle reveal effective clearance of overloaded intermediates by exercise.....	95
4.1 Introduction.....	95
4.2 Experiment.....	96
4.2.1 Chemicals and solutions.....	96
4.2.2 Animal experiment.....	97
4.2.3 Sample preparation	97
4.2.4 Instrument analysis	99
4.2.5 Method validation	100
4.2.6 Data extraction and metabolites identification.....	100
4.2.7 Statistic analysis	101
4.3 Results.....	101
4.3.1 Phenotypic characterization of <i>db/m+</i> and <i>db/db</i> mice in response to exercise	101
4.3.2 Multivariate statistic analysis.....	103
4.3.3 Discriminated metabolites in response to diabetes and exercise	112
4.3.4 Correlation analysis of acylcarnitines with SM/BW in response to T2DM and exercise.....	118
4.4 Discussion.....	121

4.4.1 Regulatory effect of exercise on purine metabolism pathway reveals more efficient energy utilization on <i>db/db</i> diabetic mice.....	123
4.4.2 Exercise exerts good role in maintaining the level of carnitine in skeletal muscle of <i>db/db</i> mice	124
4.4.3 Exercise exerts good effect in attenuating the accumulation of acylcarnitines to improve insulin resistance.....	124
4.5 Summary of this chapter	126
Chapter 5 Physical exercise ameliorates renal metabolic disorder during diabetic nephropathy in mice	128
5.1 Introduction.....	128
5.2 Experiment.....	129
5.2.1 Chemicals and solutions.....	129
5.2.2 Animal experiment.....	130
5.2.3 Plasma and urine parameters.....	130
5.2.4 Tissue processing and histological evaluation	131
5.2.5 Sample preparation for LC-MS and GC-MS analysis	131
5.2.6 Instrument analysis	133
5.2.7 Method verification.....	139
5.2.8 Preprocess of GC-MS data and LC-MS data and metabolites identification	139
5.2.9 RT-PCR on kidney mRNA levels	140
5.2.10 Data analysis	141
5.3 Results.....	143

5.3.1 Exercise reduces DN induced inflammation, fibrosis and mesangial expansion	143
5.3.2 Regular physical activity reduces lipidemia	146
5.3.3 Method assessment of LC-MS and GC-MS analysis	147
5.3.4 Multivariate statistic analysis	148
5.3.5 Changes of renal metabolites related to diabetic nephropathy	150
5.3.6 Renal metabolic changes related to exercise.....	159
5.4 Discussion.....	160
5.4.1 Diabetic nephropathy and physical activity	160
5.4.2 Exercise has good effect in alleviating lipidemia on DN mice.....	161
5.4.3 Exercise exerts positive effect in improving DN induced metabolic acidosis	162
5.4.4 Exercise may alleviate DN induced inflammation through accelerating BCAA metabolism.....	163
5.4.5 Exercise may ameliorate DN induced inflammation through alleviating the accumulation of uric acid.....	164
5.5 Summary of this chapter	165
Chapter 6 Conclusions and future work	167
REFERENCES	171
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