

Effect of Preeclampsia on Carboxyhemoglobin Levels: A Mechanism for a Decrease in P_{50}

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COHb levels were measured in 15 preeclamptic pregnant women and 15 normal pregnant women to investigate the cause for the decrease in P_{50} associated with preeclampsia. The authors also included six normal and six preeclamptic pregnant patients from the above groups in the determination of P_{50} . Measurements of COHb levels were performed in a Radiometer OSM2 Hemoximeter®. Determination of P_{50} was done using an IL 237 Tonometer, a Radiometer, OSM2 Hemoximeter®, and a Corning® 168 pH/Blood Gas Analyzer. Preeclamptic pregnant patients had a mean COHb level of 2.8%, whereas normal pregnant women had a mean COHb level of 0.7% ($P < 0.001$). Preeclamptic patients also had a significantly lower (24.4 mmHg) P_{50} than normal pregnant women ($P_{50} = 30.1$ mmHg) ($P < 0.001$). The authors conclude that a significant elevation of COHb in preeclamptic pregnant women is partly responsible for a significant decrease in P_{50} seen in preeclampsia. (Key words: Hemoglobin, carboxy. Oxygen: oxyhemoglobin dissociation; P_{50} . Pregnancy: normal; preeclampsia; preeclamptic.)

WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY reported that preeclampsia (pregnancy-induced hypertension with proteinuria, edema, or both after 20 weeks gestation) is associated with a decrease in P_{50} .¹ It has also been shown that normal pregnancy is associated with an increase in P_{50} .¹⁻³ The mechanisms responsible for these changes in P_{50} in both normal and preeclamptic pregnancies have not been elucidated. However, recent studies suggest that there is increased red cell destruction, both intravascularly and extravascularly, in preeclampsia.^{4,5} Evidence also suggests that endogenous production of carbon monoxide is elevated with increased heme catabolism,^{6,7} and that an increase in carboxyhemoglobin levels causes a leftward shift in oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve.^{8,9} Therefore, we undertook this study to examine the effect of preeclampsia on both COHb and P_{50} .

Materials and Methods

With prior approval from our Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, we mea-

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sured COHb levels in 15 normal pregnant women (ages 18-40 yr) and 15 preeclamptic pregnant women (ages 18-38 yr) at or near term. We also determined P_{50} in the first six patients from each of the above groups of pregnant women. All the pregnant women included in this study were non-smokers. Five milliliters of venous blood was collected into a heparinized syringe from each of the informed volunteer patients. Of this blood, 100 μ l was used in the measurement of COHb levels. We used a Radiometer, OSM2 Hemoximeter®, and deoxygenation capillary kit (Radiometer) in the measurement of COHb levels.

P_{50} DETERMINATION

After the COHb measurements, the remaining blood from six normal and six preeclamptic pregnant women was immediately subjected to closed tonometry in an IL 237 tonometer with gas mixtures containing 3.5% or 4.5% oxygen, 5.6% carbon dioxide, and balance nitrogen at 37° C for 15 min. Closed tonometry was performed to avoid the escape of carbon monoxide from the blood sample. There is evidence showing that open tonometry is associated with variable loss of carbon monoxide.¹⁰ Results from our own laboratory also showed that, with open tonometry, there was more than 50% loss of carbon monoxide from the blood of preeclamptic patients. The mean (\pm SD) COHb levels before and after open tonometry were $2.5 \pm 0.5\%$ and $0.99 \pm 0.1\%$, respectively; whereas, with closed tonometry, there was no decrease in COHb levels (before tonometry, $2.5 \pm 0.5\%$; and after tonometry, $2.5 \pm 0.4\%$). At the end of each tonometry, total hemoglobin, per cent COHb, and per cent oxygen saturation were measured in a Radiometer, OSM2 Hemoximeter. Simultaneously, blood gases were measured in a Corning 168 pH/blood gas analyzer. The measured P_{O_2} data were corrected to a pH of 7.40. A two-point saturation curve was plotted in the steep portion of the oxyhemoglobin dissociation curve, and P_{50} was obtained from the saturation curve. The Radiometer, OSM2 Hemoximeter, and the Corning 168 pH/blood gas analyzer were calibrated before each measurement.

The data were analyzed for statistical significance of difference by using a Student's *t* test (two-tailed *P*). A difference was considered significant if $P < 0.05$.

Results

There is a significant elevation of COHb levels in preeclamptic pregnant patients when compared to nor-

TABLE 1. Effect of Normal and Preeclamptic Pregnancies on COHb and P₅₀ Values

Subjects	COHb, %*		P ₅₀ , mmHg*	
	Mean ± SD	n	Mean ± SD	n
Normal Pregnant	0.7 ± 0.2	15	30.1 ± 0.14	6
Preeclamptic Pregnant	2.8 ± 0.7	15	24.4 ± 0.15	6

* Significance of difference between normal and preeclamptic pregnant women ($P < 0.001$), Student's *t* test, two-tailed *P*.

mal pregnant women (table 1) ($P < 0.001$). There is also a significant decrease in P₅₀ in preeclamptic parturients when compared to normal parturients (fig. 1, table 1) ($P < 0.001$). There is no significant difference in paired COHb levels before and after closed tonometry. The mean COHb levels in the blood of six normal pregnant women before and after closed tonometry were 0.8 ± 0.2% and 0.8 ± 0.2%, respectively. Six preeclamptic pregnant patients had COHb levels of 2.5 ± 0.6% and 2.5 ± 0.5% before and after tonometry, respectively.

Discussion

Increased concentration of COHb has a direct effect on oxyhemoglobin causing a decrease in P₅₀.⁸ COHb also has an inhibitory effect in the production of 2,3-DPG in red blood cells.⁸ Catabolism of circulating red

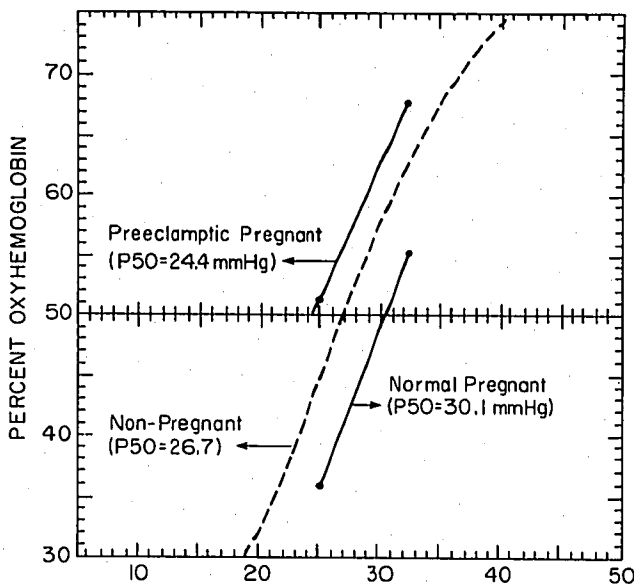


FIG. 1. Effect of normal and preeclamptic pregnancies on P₅₀. Only steep portions of oxyhemoglobin dissociation curves were shown for normal pregnant and preeclamptic pregnant women. The standard deviations were included in the text.

blood cells accounts for approximately 60% of the endogenous carbon monoxide.¹¹ The endogenous production of carbon monoxide occurs predominantly *via* the heme catabolic pathway, in which heme is broken down to equimolar amounts of bilirubin, iron, and carbon monoxide.

Our present data on COHb levels contradict the values we have reported previously.¹ The main reason for this discrepancy is due to the marked difference in the techniques we used in the measurement of COHb levels. In the previous report, we measured COHb levels after the blood sample was subjected to open tonometry with 400–500 ml flow of gas mixture. In this report, we measured the COHb levels before the blood samples were subjected to closed tonometry, and also at the end of closed tonometry.

Our results confirm that normal pregnancy is associated with an increase in P₅₀, and preeclamptic pregnancy is associated with a decrease in P₅₀. Our present data also demonstrate that there is a significant elevation of COHb levels in the blood of preeclamptic pregnant patients, and that the increased levels of COHb are partly responsible for the decrease in P₅₀ in preeclamptic pregnant women.

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