Profound haemodilution during normothermic cardiopulmonary bypass influences neither gastrointestinal permeability nor cytokine release in coronary artery bypass graft surgery

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Background. Cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) impairs intestinal barrier function and induces systemic inflammation after cardiac surgery. The objective of this study was to evaluate the effect of profound haemodilution (haematocrit 19–21%) during normothermic CPB on gastrointestinal permeability and cytokine release in comparison with a standard haemodilution (haematocrit 24–26%).

Methods. This was a prospective, controlled, randomized pilot trial of 60 patients without gastrointestinal disease undergoing normothermic CPB (35.5–36 °C) for coronary artery bypass graft surgery. Gastrointestinal permeability was measured by the triple-sugar technique (sucrose, lactulose, and mannitol excretion in urine) before and after CPB. Interleukin (IL)-6, IL-10, and tumour necrosis factor alpha (TNFα) were quantified using enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays.

Results. Data from 59 patients (19–21% haematocrit, n=28; 24–26% haematocrit, n=31) were analysed. Data on gastrointestinal permeability were available for 47 patients (19–21% haematocrit, n=23; 24–26% haematocrit, n=24), blood samples for cytokine analysis from 59 patients. Mannitol excretion was normal before and after surgery without significant differences between the groups (after operation: 5.4% vs 2.9%, P=0.193). Lactulose and sucrose excretion was within a normal range before surgery and increased afterwards without differences between the groups. IL-6, IL-10, and TNFα were elevated after surgery, but there was no difference between the groups [IL-6 (P=0.78), IL-10 (P=0.74), and TNFα (P=0.67)].

Conclusions. Profound haemodilution during normothermic CPB brought about significant changes neither in intestinal permeability nor in cytokine release. It may be concluded that a haematocrit of 19–21% during normothermic CPB does not impair intestinal barrier function and cytokine response in patients without gastrointestinal comorbidity.

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The concept of haemodilution using crystalloid solutions to avoid transfusions for open heart surgery was introduced by Neptune and colleagues in 1959 and was thought to improve blood flow to tissues and to facilitate venous return. In contrast to this concept, low haematocrit levels during cardiac surgery are often regarded as a trigger for blood transfusions to prevent a decrease in oxygen transport induced by haemodilutional anaemia. Transfusions, however, carry the risk of enhancing the postoperative inflammatory response and are associated...
with increased short- and long-term mortality after cardiac surgery. The ‘critical’ level of haematocrit determining a mismatch of oxygen delivery and oxygen consumption remains unclear. At the intestinal level, this may be explained by the fact that the microcirculation assures a sufficient intestinal tissue oxygenation over a wide range of haematocrits. Yet van Bommel and colleagues described that below a critical haematocrit of 15% during normothermic haemodilution, intestinal microvascular oxygen supply was significantly decreased in rats.

Various studies have shown an increase in gastric duodenal and intestinal permeability with CPB. Increased gut permeability may lead to translocation of bacteria and toxins and immune activation after surgery as has been demonstrated in critically ill patients. Furthermore, it has been shown that the loss of gastrointestinal integrity and the initiation of a systemic inflammatory response syndrome are associated with an increase in mortality and morbidity in patients undergoing cardiac surgery. This may be caused by a ‘crosstalk’ between bowel function and inflammatory response in terms of interleukin (IL)-6 release by endothelial cells of the gut and the release of TNFα by CD14+ macrophages activated by endotoxemia.

Cardiac surgery using CPB produces an acute inflammatory response involving both pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines. The release of cytokines depends on a complex system of diverse stimuli, such as contact activation of the complement system. The trauma of the surgical procedure induces a release of IL-6 that is correlated with the magnitude of the trauma.

Previous work has shown that a haematocrit of 20% compared with 25% during normothermic CPB maintains whole body oxygen delivery above a critical level during coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery. We hypothesized that in comparison with standard haemodilution (haematocrit 24–26%), profound haemodilution (haematocrit 19–21%) during normothermic cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) exerts different effects on gastrointestinal permeability and cytokine release. Here, we present extended data from a previous study (ISRCTN 35655335) that investigated the influence of haemodilutional anaemia on length of stay in the intensive care unit (ICU) after cardiac surgery.

Methods

Group assignment

Inclusion criteria were patients aged between 18 and 70 yr with a preoperative haematocrit >36% undergoing elective CABG. Exclusion criteria included combined cardiac procedures, a left ventricular ejection fraction <40%, acute or chronic hepatitis or hepatic disease, any gastrointestinal diseases, and renal insufficiency. Patients were allocated into the trial groups on the basis of a computer-generated randomization list.

Anaesthetic, CPB, and intensive care management

Our standard anaesthetic practice for patients undergoing CABG is to use etomidate, fentanyl, and pancuronium for induction and isoflurane with midazolam and fentanyl infusion for maintenance. In all patients, a femoral artery was punctured with a 4 Fr cannula (PulsioCath, Pulsion, Munich, Germany). The femoral artery catheter was used for measurement of arterial pressure, calculations of extravascular lung water and intrathoracic blood volumes, and to obtain blood samples for cytokine measurements. A central venous catheter and a pulmonary artery catheter (Thermomultipath Catheter, Arrow, Reading, PA, USA) were inserted via the right internal jugular vein.

The prime for the CPB circuit consisted of crystalloid fluid (600 ml), hydroxyethylstarch 6% (HES) (500 ml) solution (Voluven®, Fresenius-Kabi, Bad Homburg, Germany). A total dose of 50 000 KIU aprotinin per kilogram bodyweight was administered during CPB. Pump flow was adjusted to maintain a mean arterial pressure (MAP) of 55–60 mm Hg and a venous oxygen saturation >75% during CPB. When the MAP could not be maintained by adjusting the pump flow, norepinephrine was used. During CPB, an arterial partial pressure of oxygen (PaO2) of 20–26.6 kPa was maintained. Body temperature was kept between 35.5°C and 36.0°C during CPB and intermittent antegrade warm blood cardioplegia was used as described by Calafiore and colleagues. Isovolaemic haemodilution using a 6% HES 130/0.4 solution was performed to reduce haematocrit to a level of 5% (haematocrit 24–26%) above the target haematocrit level before institution of CPB. Autologous blood obtained during haemodilution was stored at room temperature and retransfused after weaning from CPB. For serial measurements of haematocrit, a blood gas analyzer (ABL-700 series, Radiometer, Copenhagen, Denmark) was used.

Gastrointestinal permeability

To quantify gastrointestinal permeability, a standardized triple-sugar test using sucrose 20 g, mannitol 5 g, and lactulose 10 g was performed 1 day before surgery and 6 h after surgery. Before operation, each patient provided a pre-test urine sample. After this, the patients were given the triple-sugar solution dissolved in water 100 ml. Afterwards urine was collected over a 5 h period for the determination of sugar excretion. The same test was performed 6 h after surgery; if the patients were still ventilated, the sugar solution was administered via a nasogastric tube. Except for the free intake of water, patients fasted during the test. Total urine volume was recorded on completion of the test. The sugar solution was produced by the pharmacy of the Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Campus Charité Mitte. The sugar concentrations in the urine were measured by
Cytokines
The concentrations of IL-6, IL-10, and TNFα were measured during and after surgery. Arterial blood was obtained at five different time points: before surgery after haemodilution, 30 min after start of CPB, and 1, 6, and 18 h after admission to the ICU. Blood was drawn in tubes filled with ethylene diamine tetraacetic acid (Fa. Sarstedt, Nümbrecht, Germany) and centrifuged (Hettich, Tuttlingen, Germany) at 3000 rpm for 10 min. The supernatant was stored at −80°C. An enzyme-linked immuno-sorbent assay (QuantiKine, R&D Systems, Minneapolis, MN, USA) was used. The lower detection limit of the IL-6 assay was 0.70 pg ml⁻¹, of the IL-10 assay 3.9 pg ml⁻¹, and of TNFα 7.8 pg ml⁻¹. The intra- and inter-assay coefficient of variance of the assays used were: IL-6 1.6–4.2% and 3.3–6.4%, IL-10 1.7–5.0% and 5.9–7.5%, and TNFα 5.3–8.1% and 9.3–10.0%, respectively.

Statistical methods
Owing to the limited sample sizes and non-symmetrically distributed observations, we used non-parametric statistics. Results were expressed as median and inter-quartile range (IQR) in the case of continuous variables. For gastrointestinal permeability, results were expressed as a percentage of recovery of the ingested dose of the sugars and the corresponding 25th and 75th percentiles. Absolute and relative frequencies were used for categorical and dichotomous variables. The effect of haemodilution regarding gastrointestinal permeability and cytokine response was analysed using χ² and Fisher’s exact test for categorical and dichotomous variables, respectively. In the case of continuous variables, we applied the Mann–Whitney U-test for inter-group analysis. For longitudinal data, a non-parametric multivariate analysis of variance (non-parametric MANOVA), described by Brunner, for repeated measurements and small sample sizes in two and three factorial designs was used. Multiple testing for differences between the groups in question was regarded as exploratory and was not adjusted for multiplicity.

Results
After institutional approval by the local ethics committee and preoperative written informed consent, 60 patients undergoing CABG were considered eligible for this randomized controlled clinical trial. One patient had to be excluded from analysis as the autologous blood showed multiple clots after CPB and could not be retransfused. Fifty-nine patients remained for statistical analysis. Data from the triple-sugar test were available from 47 patients (19–21% haematocrit, n=23; 24–26% haematocrit, n=24), since preoperative urine samples could not be obtained from 12 patients. Data on cytokine release were available from all 59 patients. Patient characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Gut permeability
Mannitol
Preoperative and postoperative measurements of mannitol excretion were within normal limits (normal: <27% of the administered sugar). Median urinary mannitol excretion did not differ between the groups before surgery. The median (IQR) in the 20% haematocrit group was 16.6% (11.5–24.1%), whereas that in the 25% haematocrit group was 15.5% (10.5–23.1%, P=0.439). After surgery, mannitol excretion was significantly reduced in both groups: 20% haematocrit 5.4% (2.7–6.7%, P<0.001) and 25% haematocrit 2.9% (1.5–7.8%, P<0.001). Postoperative mannitol excretion did not differ between study groups (P=0.193) (Fig. 1A).

Lactulose
Preoperative lactulose excretion (normal: <0.44% of the administered sugar concentration) was within a normal range in the haematocrit 20% group with a median of 0.35% (0.2–0.5%) and in the haematocrit 25% group at 0.4% (0.2–0.7%). After operation, urinary excretion of
Sucrose excretion was elevated (normal: <0.23% of the administered sugar concentration) in both groups after surgery. The mean value in the haematocrit 20% group increased from 0.09% (25th–75th quartiles: 0.05–0.15%) to 1.23% (25th–75th quartiles: 0.4–3.2%) \( P<0.001 \) and in the haematocrit 25% group from 0.12% (25th–75th quartiles: 0.00–0.22%) to 0.65% (25th–75th quartiles: 0.3–1.4%) \( P<0.001 \). The groups did not differ before operation \( P=0.776 \). After operation, an insignificant trend to a higher sucrose permeability \( P=0.098 \) in the 20% haematocrit group was seen (Fig. 1c).

**Sucrose**

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**Permeability index**

In both groups, the mean of PI was within the normal range before surgery without significant differences [20% haematocrit: 0.02 (0.02–0.02%); 25% haematocrit: 0.02% (0.02–0.09%)]. After surgery, an increase in lactulose and a decline in urinary mannitol excretion were measured in both groups. This resulted in a significant increase of the PI in both groups: in the 20% haematocrit group from 0.02 to 0.4 (0.07–0.7%, \( P<0.001 \)) and in the 25% haematocrit group from 0.02 to 0.2 (0.09–0.4%, \( P<0.001 \)) after surgery. The postoperative PI did not differ between the groups (before surgery: \( P=0.485 \); after surgery: \( P=0.288 \) (Fig. 2).

**Perioperative cytokine release**

**IL-6 and IL-10**

The time courses of IL-6 and IL-10 are shown in Figure 3A and N. The highest levels were reached 1 h after admission to the ICU and were for IL-6 121.2 pg ml\(^{-1}\) (108.7–178.7 pg ml\(^{-1}\)) in the 20% haematocrit group and 121.5 pg ml\(^{-1}\) (85.3–190.4 pg ml\(^{-1}\)) in the 25% haematocrit group (Fig. 3A). Highest levels of IL-10 in the 20%...
haematocrit group were 57.3 pg ml\(^{-1}\) (49.2–76.2 pg ml\(^{-1}\)) and in the 25% haematocrit group were 69.3 pg ml\(^{-1}\) (51.3–99.8 pg ml\(^{-1}\)). Levels declined continuously afterwards, yet never reached the initial values (Fig. 3B). In both groups, all measurements were significantly elevated compared with baseline values at all time points \((P<0.001)\). There were no significant differences between the groups in the multivariate analysis of variance of Brunner \((P=0.78 \text{ for IL-6}; \ P=0.74 \text{ for IL-10})\).

**Tumour necrosis factor alpha**

The trend of TNF\(\alpha\) plasma levels is shown in Fig. 4. Baseline values of TNF\(\alpha\) (norm <15.6 pg ml\(^{-1}\)) did not differ between the groups; mean values in the 20% haematocrit group were 7.7 and 7.6 pg ml\(^{-1}\) in the 25% haematocrit group before surgery. Over the study period, TNF\(\alpha\) reached the highest levels in both groups 30 min after the start of CPB [20% haematocrit group 8.2 pg ml\(^{-1}\) (6.3–9.1 pg ml\(^{-1}\)) and 25% haematocrit group 8.3 pg ml\(^{-1}\) (7.5–9.3 pg ml\(^{-1}\))]. Thirty minutes after the start of CPB, TNF\(\alpha\) plasma levels were significantly increased [20% haematocrit group: \(P=0.03\); 25% haematocrit group: \(P=0.008\)] compared with the baseline. Between the groups, there were no differences over the study period \((P=0.67)\) (Fig. 4).

**Discussion**

In our study, both intestinal surface and gastrointestinal barrier function were severely disturbed by normothermic CPB for elective CABG. We identified an increased release of cytokines (IL-6, IL-10, and TNF\(\alpha\)) after surgery. However, profound haemodilution (haematocrit of 19–21% \(\text{vs}\) standard haemodilution (haematocrit of 24–26%) did not have an impact on either intestinal barrier or inflammatory reactions.

**Gastrointestinal permeability**

Our results show that gastrointestinal permeability measured using a triple-sugar technique is increased after CPB; however, no differences were observed between profound and standard haemodilution.

Gastrointestinal permeability was evaluated indirectly by measurement of sugars in the urine. Sucrose and lactulose were elevated in postoperative urine samples which indicate an increased gastroduodenal and intestinal permeability, as these sugars are excreted only in very small amounts with the urine under physiological conditions. Moreover, the increase in intestinal permeability is confirmed by the increase in the PI, calculated as the ratio of...
leagues observed increased perfusion of the jejunal haematocrit of 25–33% during CPB. Thoren and colleagues reported that haemodilutional anaemia is associated with a reduction in intestinal oxygen delivery and may impair mucosal integrity of the intestine. In eight patients with a baseline haematocrit of 37 (3%), this group also showed in 16 splenectomized beagles that under profound haemodilution (haematocrit 19–21%), intestinal oxygen delivery did not decrease. It has to be emphasized, however, that temperature management during CPB was not controlled, so that possible differences in body temperatures may have influenced the results.

The increase in intestinal permeability in our study may be explained by a reduction in intestinal oxygen delivery or loss of functional mucosal surface, which leads to a reduced absorption of mannitol. Previous work described that splanchnic oxygen consumption and arterial lactate concentrations were increased while splanchnic blood flow and oxygen delivery were not decreased during and after normothermic CPB. This is in part supported by results from our own group showing that a haematocrit of 20% maintained global oxygen delivery above a critical level after elective CABG in low-risk patients. Assuming a constant splanchnic blood flow, our results may indicate that profound normovolaemic haemodilution under normothermia during CPB is still above a ‘critical’ level and is not a risk factor per se for increased intestinal permeability.

**Cytokine release**

Release of IL-6, IL-10, and TNFα did not differ between patients subjected to profound or standard haemodilution during normothermic CPB. The highest levels of IL-6 were measured 1 h after admission to the ICU in both groups which confirms results from other studies describing highest levels up to 3 h after surgery. The relatively delayed increase in IL-6 might be explained by a ‘reperfusion syndrome’ after CPB. Wan and colleagues suggested that the post-ischaemic reperfusion of the myocardium is the source of IL-6 and TNFα. In their study, IL-10 reached its peak, similar to IL-6, 1 h after admission to the ICU and declined afterwards.

In our study, TNFα levels did not show significant differences between the groups. This finding is supported by other studies. Aprotinin, which was used as routine antifibrinolytic therapy in our study, has been suggested to have immune modulating side-effects. However, these were not confirmed by a randomized study of 200 patients undergoing CPB, in which neither the administration of aprotinin (2×10^6 U) nor of heparin (300 IU kg^{-1}) attenuated the release of TNFα, IL-6, and IL-8. Given the fact that all patients underwent the same treatment, these immune modulating effects would have had to be similar in both groups. Furthermore, body temperature and the surgical trauma itself influence cytokine release after cardiac surgery.

In conclusion, the results of our trial showed that profound haemodilutional anaemia during normothermic CPB did not induce an increase in intestinal permeability or cytokine release compared with a standard haematocrit of

Fig 4 Baseline values of TNFα plasma concentration. Results are given as median and range. TNFα plasma concentration was measured at five measure points, before surgery, and 30 min during, after 1, 6, and 18 h at ICU. Over the study period, TNFα reached the highest levels in both groups: 30 min after start of CPB (haematocrit 20% group: 8.20 pg ml^{-1} (25th–75th quartiles: 6.27–9.08 pg ml^{-1}); haematocrit 25% group: 8.29 pg ml^{-1} (25th–75th quartiles: 7.53–9.27 pg ml^{-1})). Only at 30 min after start of CPB, TNFα plasma levels were significantly increased (P<0.03), whereas the subsequent plasma levels did not show significant differences between the groups. This finding is supported by other studies.

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In conclusion, the results of our trial showed that profound haemodilutional anaemia during normothermic CPB did not induce an increase in intestinal permeability or cytokine release compared with a standard haematocrit of
24–26%. It may be concluded that a hematocrit of 19–21% is safe to maintain the integrity of the intestinal mucosa and an adequate immune response in CABG patients subjected to normothermic CPB without gastrointestinal comorbidity. Since this study was designed as a pilot study, our results have to be confirmed by a larger and sufficiently powered study.

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