

Alterations in the Electroretinogram of Newborn Piglets by Propionic Acid-Derivative Nonsteroidal Antiinflammatory Drugs but Not by Indomethacin and Diclofenac

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ABSTRACT

Different nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAID), especially ibuprofen, are being considered as an alternative to indomethacin for use in the newborn and as antipyretics for infants. However, some of these NSAID have been shown to cause visual complications. We therefore studied the effects of different NSAID indomethacin 19.6 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (7 mg/kg), diclofenac 15.7 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (5 mg/kg), ibuprofen 48 and 194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (10 and 40 mg/kg), naproxen 79 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (20 mg/kg), and flurbiprofen 41 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (10 mg/kg) on photopic and scotopic electroretinograms (ERG) and retinal prostaglandin E_2 , prostaglandin $F_{2\alpha}$, and 6-keto-prostaglandin $F_{1\alpha}$ levels in piglets 1–5 d old. All NSAID decreased retinal prostaglandin levels, but their effects on the ERG were not identical. Indomethacin and diclofenac did not alter the ERG. In contrast, the propionic acid derivatives ibuprofen (the two doses used), naproxen, and flurbiprofen af-

ected the amplitude as well as the implicit time of the ERG under photopic and scotopic conditions. These changes are suggestive of generalized alterations in the function of rods and cones. Prior inhibition of prostaglandin synthesis by indomethacin did not modify the effects of ibuprofen on the ERG. These findings thus show a dissociation between the effects of NSAID on the ERG and prostaglandin synthesis. Because ERG changes are associated with visual alterations, these effects of propionic acid derivatives should be taken into account before considering their use in infants. (*Pediatr Res* 37: 81–85, 1995)

Abbreviations

NSAID, nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drug
ERG, electroretinogram
PG, prostaglandin

It is generally agreed that NSAID exert their actions mainly by inhibiting cyclooxygenase activity and in turn PG synthesis (1). NSAID have been found to be of benefit in the treatment of many ocular inflammatory conditions such as uveitis (2), posterior scleritis (3), aphakic cystoid macular edema (4), and allergic conjunctivitis (5). NSAID can also enhance the range of retinal and choroidal blood flow autoregulation (6) and protect retinal function after asphyxia in the newborn (7). However, the effects of different NSAID on retinal function are not identical and do not always correlate with an inhibition of PG synthesis (7, 8). For instance, indomethacin can compromise retinal and choroidal blood flow, and these effects may be unrelated to cyclooxygenase inhibition (8). Ibuprofen can

cause ocular complications such as blurring of vision, scotoma, depressed contrast sensitivity (9–11), decreased wave amplitude, and an increase in conduction time of the visual evoked potential (12).

In the course of studies on the effects of NSAID on retinal function, we observed that ibuprofen altered the electrophysiologic function of the retina of newborn pigs. To our knowledge, these effects of ibuprofen have not been reported, and it is not known whether this is a unique property of ibuprofen or is shared by all inhibitors of PG synthesis. Moreover, this issue could be of concern given the fact that NSAID other than indomethacin, in particular ibuprofen, are being considered for use in the newborn (13) and heeded as alternative antipyretics in young infants (14, 15). We therefore studied the effects of three different groups of NSAID (propionic acid derivatives, ibuprofen, naproxen, and flurbiprofen; indole derivative, indomethacin; and phenylacetic acid derivative, diclofenac) on the ERG of piglets in relation to their inhibitory effects on PG synthesis. We are the first to report that propionic acid deriv-

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atives but not other classes of NSAID alter the ERG and that this effect is unrelated to an inhibition of PG synthesis.

METHODS

Animals and Surgical Preparation

Piglets (1–5 d old, 1.2–2.2 kg) were used in this study according to a protocol approved by the Animal Care Committee of the Research Center of Hôpital Ste. Justine. The pig was used because its retina shares similarities with that of the human, such as the absence of tapetum, the ratio of rods to cones, an holangiogenic vascularization, and a paracentral fovea (16, 17).

Animals were anesthetized with halothane (2.5%). A small polyethylene catheter (Intramedic PE-50, Becton Dickinson & Co., Parsippany, NJ) was introduced in the femoral vein for drug administration and to sample blood for measurement of pH, P_{CO_2} , and P_{O_2} . Tracheostomy was performed, and the animals were ventilated with air by means of a Harvard small-animal respirator (Ealing Scientific Limited, Quebec, Canada). After surgery, halothane was discontinued and the animals were sedated with acepromazine (0.02 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ i.v.) and paralyzed with pancuronium (0.14 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ i.v.). Animals were allowed to stabilize for approximately 1 h, and their body temperature was maintained at 38°C by means of a heating pad.

Experimental Protocol

Treatments. Thirty-one animals were randomly assigned to receive an i.v. injection of indomethacin (19.6 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$, 7 mg/kg), diclofenac (15.7 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$, 5 mg/kg), ibuprofen (48 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$, 10 mg/kg), ibuprofen (194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$, 40 mg/kg), naproxen (79 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$, 20 mg/kg), flurbiprofen (41 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$, 10 mg/kg), or saline; these doses have previously been shown to reduce PG levels (8, 18, 19). Naproxen and the lower dose of ibuprofen were within therapeutic limits for young children (13, 14, 20); doses for children have not been determined for the other drugs with the exception of indomethacin, hence adult doses were used.

Electroretinograms. Pupils were maximally dilated with cyclopentolate hydrochloride (1%) (Alcon Canada, Inc., Mississauga, Canada) eye drops. ERG were recorded (7, 21) before and 1 h after drug administration using corneal contact lens electrodes (ERG Jet, Universo, SA-La-Chaux-De-Fonds, Switzerland) filled with hydroxypropyl-methylcellulose (2%). Reference and ground electrodes were placed on the forehead and the scalp, respectively. The head of the animal was adjusted in the center of a Ganzfeld stimulator (LKC Technologies Inc., Gaithersburg, MD), the flash stimulus (Grass Instrument Co., Quincy, MA) was set at 3.65 $\text{cd}\cdot\text{s}/\text{m}^2$. ERG signals were amplified using the EPIC 2000 electrodiagnostic instrument (LKC Technologies Inc.) with a bandwidth of 0.3 to 500 Hz. After a 40-min period of dark adaptation, scotopic (combined rod and cone) responses were obtained; 10 min after light adaptation, photopic (cone) responses were measured. Measurements were based on the average response to 10 flash stimulations and stored on computer disks for subsequent analysis (7, 21). The amplitude of the a-wave was calculated as the difference in voltage from baseline to the maximum negative deflection of the ERG; the b-wave amplitude was calculated from the most negative deflection (peak of a-wave) of the ERG to the maximum positive one. The implicit time for each wave was calculated as the time from the flash onset to the peak of the wave.

Measurement of PG. The effect of different NSAID on PGE_2 , $\text{PGF}_{2\alpha}$, and 6-keto- $\text{PGF}_{1\alpha}$ (a stable metabolite of PGI_2) was measured in separate groups of animals ($n = 3\text{--}4$ in each treatment group) 1 h after the drug or saline treatments described for the ERG. Animals were killed by an injection of pentobarbital (483 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ i.v.). Eyes were immediately enucleated and placed on ice; the retina was dissected and suspended in ice-cold buffer (pH 7.4) containing 5 mM Tris-HCl, 0.67 mM acetylsalicylic acid, and 0.5 mM sodium edetate. Retinas were homogenized, and an aliquot was used to measure proteins (22). The homogenate was centrifuged at $1000 \times g$ for 10 min to remove undisrupted cells. The supernatant was recentrifuged at $50\,000 \times g$ for 30 min at 4°C to remove membranes and enhance the extraction of PG on octadecylsilyl

Table 1. Changes in a- and b-wave amplitude and implicit times during photopic and scotopic conditions 1 h after treatment with saline and different nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs in newborn pigs

Treatment	Dose ($\mu\text{mol/kg}$)	a-Wave				b-Wave			
		Amplitude		Implicit time		Amplitude		Implicit time	
		Photopic	Scotopic	Photopic	Scotopic	Photopic	Scotopic	Photopic	Scotopic
Saline		0.2 \pm 2	9.2 \pm 6	0.6 \pm 0.7	0.9 \pm 0.5	3.8 \pm 5.9	15.7 \pm 20.5	0.1 \pm 0.7	0.8 \pm 1.3
Indomethacin	19.6	-1 \pm 1	-1.7 \pm 8.7	0.3 \pm 0.7	0.5 \pm 0.6	-11 \pm 9.3	0 \pm 9.3	1.8 \pm 1.1	1 \pm 0.8
Diclofenac	15.7	-2 \pm 3	4.3 \pm 5	0.3 \pm 0.2	0.5 \pm 0.8	2.5 \pm 3.9	13 \pm 13	1.2 \pm 1.4	1.7 \pm 0.9
Naproxen	79	-3 \pm 1	2.3 \pm 8	1.2 \pm 0.2*	2.2 \pm 0.3*	11.3 \pm 12.4	0.3 \pm 28.6	2.8 \pm 0.7*	2.2 \pm 0.3*
Flurbiprofen	41	5 \pm 3	1.6 \pm 4.2	0.8 \pm 0.1	1.3 \pm 0.1*	-2.5 \pm 17.5	-3.5 \pm 15	2.3 \pm .3*	3.5 \pm 1.5*
Ibuprofen	48	3 \pm 1.4	28.4 \pm 3.8*	0.2 \pm 0.3	0 \pm 0.1	21.5 \pm 6.5*	55.2 \pm 12*	0 \pm 0.1	1.5 \pm 0.2*
Ibuprofen	194	1.5 \pm 1.2	-1.8 \pm 1	2.7 \pm 0.5*	1.9 \pm 0.4*	-33.1 \pm 5.4*	-43 \pm 8.3*	5.3 \pm 1.4*	3.6 \pm 0.9*
Ibuprofen	194	-0.3 \pm 2	0.5 \pm 2	1.5 \pm 0.4*	1.7 \pm 0.2*	-30 \pm 7.4*	-35 \pm 4.2*	2.0 \pm 4*	2.8 \pm 0.7*
+Indomethacin	19.6								

Values are mean \pm SEM of the difference in the amplitude (μV) and implicit time (ms) of the a- and b-wave from pre- to 1 h posttreatment; hence a negative value refers to reduction and a positive one to an increase in the parameters. $n = 3\text{--}6$ for each treatment.

* $p < 0.05$ compared with value of 0.

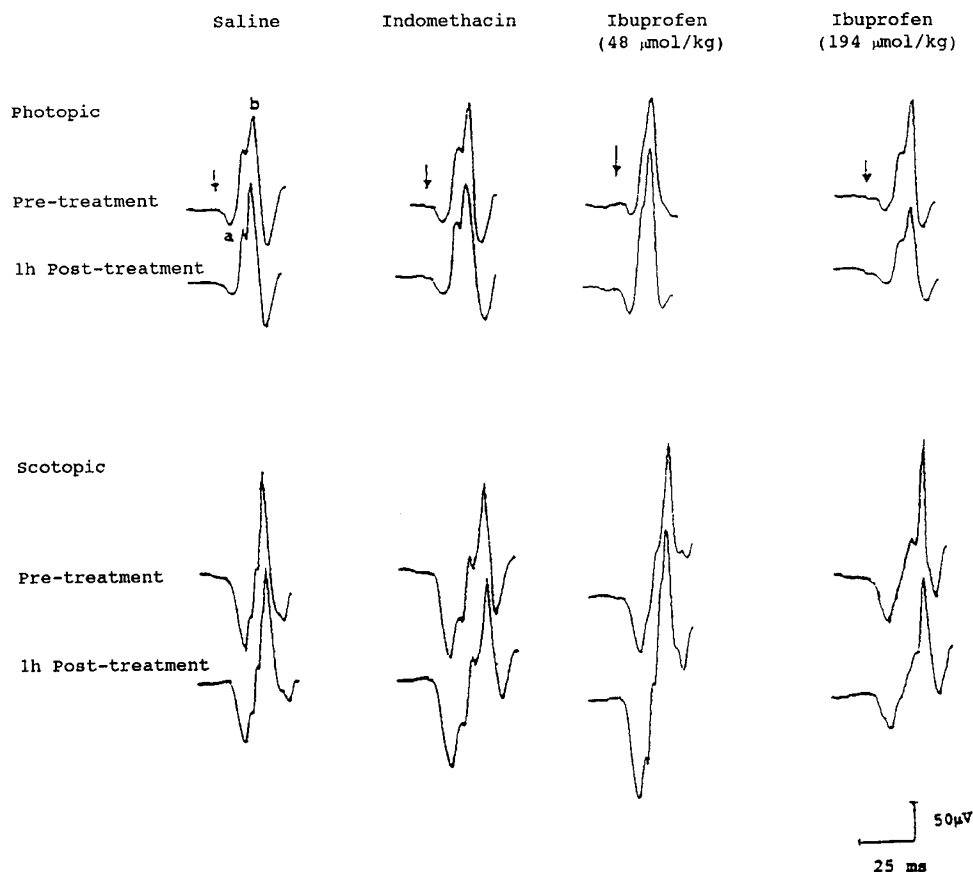


Figure 1. Photopic and scotopic ERG before and 1 h after saline, indomethacin 19.6 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (7 mg/kg), ibuprofen 48 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (10 mg/kg), and ibuprofen 194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$ (40 mg/kg) in newborn pigs. The arrows represent the flash stimulus. *a* and *b* shown on the presaline photopic ERG refer to the a- and b-waves.

silica columns (7, 8). The supernatant was dissolved in 15% ethanol and acidified to pH 3 with glacial acetic acid. The samples were applied to octadecylsilyl silica columns that were then washed with 15% aqueous ethanol followed by petroleum ether. PG were subsequently eluted with methyl formate. The efficiency of recovery after extraction for all PG was 96%. PG were measured using RIA kits, as we have previously described (7, 8). The interassay variability was $\leq 5\%$.

Drugs and chemicals. Diclofenac, indomethacin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and flurbiprofen were purchased from Sigma Chemical Co. (St. Louis, MO). RIA kits for PGE_2 , $\text{PGF}_{2\alpha}$, and 6-keto- $\text{PGF}_{1\alpha}$ were obtained from Advanced Magnetics (Boston, MA). All other chemicals were obtained from Fisher Scientific (Montreal, Quebec).

Statistical analysis. ERG and PG were analyzed by two- and one-way analysis of variance, respectively, factoring for time and treatment group, as well as by comparison among means tests. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Stability of the preparation. As indicated by pH, P_{O_2} , and P_{CO_2} , all animals were stable throughout the duration of the experiments. In the saline-treated group of animals, venous pH was 7.33 ± 0.03 , P_{CO_2} 5.97 ± 0.6 kPa, and P_{O_2} 6.03 ± 0.3 kPa; these values remained stable and were not altered by NSAID.

ERG patterns. Saline, indomethacin, and diclofenac did not exert significant effects on the a- and b-waves of the ERG (Fig.

1 and Table 1). In contrast, naproxen, flurbiprofen, and the higher dose of ibuprofen (194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$) produced a significant prolongation of the implicit time of both a- and b-waves during photopic and scotopic conditions (Fig. 1 and Table 1); in addition, ibuprofen (194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$) produced a marked depression of the b-wave amplitude by 22–31% under photopic and scotopic conditions. The lower dose of ibuprofen (48 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$) also affected the ERG by significantly increasing the a- and b-wave amplitudes and by prolonging (albeit to a lesser extent) the b-wave implicit time during scotopic recordings. Prior inhibition of PG synthesis by indomethacin in a separate group of animals ($n = 3$) did not significantly modify the effects of ibuprofen (194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$) on the ERG.

PG concentrations. Indomethacin, diclofenac, naproxen, flurbiprofen, and ibuprofen (194 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$) significantly decreased retinal levels of $\text{PGF}_{2\alpha}$, PGE_2 , and 6-keto- $\text{PGF}_{1\alpha}$ (Table 2); ibuprofen (48 $\mu\text{mol/kg}$) decreased 6-keto- $\text{PGF}_{1\alpha}$ levels. Injection of saline had no effect on retinal PG concentrations.

DISCUSSION

In the course of studies on the effects of NSAID on retinal functions, we found some evidence of adverse effects of ibuprofen on the ERG. Inconclusive evidence of such an adverse effect of ibuprofen on the ERG was found in an earlier study (7). Because ibuprofen is being considered as a substitute for indomethacin in the newborn (13) and as an antipyretic in

infants (14, 15), we compared the effects of three chemically different classes of NSAID on the ERG and PG synthesis. These studies revealed that propionic acid derivatives, ibuprofen including doses used in the human newborn and infant (13, 14), naproxen, and flurbiprofen, altered the ERG, whereas relatively high doses of the indole derivative indomethacin and the phenylacetic acid derivative diclofenac did not, although all these agents inhibited synthesis of PG.

The propionic acid-derivative NSAID produced effects on the a-wave (generated from the photoreceptors) and the b-wave (generated mainly from the Müller cells) during photopic and scotopic conditions (Fig. 1 and Table 1); this would suggest a generalized effect on the function of rods and cones as well as of the inner retina. The lower dose of ibuprofen caused an increase in the a- and b-wave amplitudes, and the higher dose caused a decrease in the b-wave amplitude as well as a slightly greater prolongation of the implicit time; thus, the effects of ibuprofen on the ERG are dose dependent. Delayed implicit time as seen in our study after ibuprofen, naproxen, and flurbiprofen and, in certain conditions, an increase in the ERG wave amplitudes are often observed as a first sign of widespread damage to rods and cones; as injury progresses, the ERG amplitudes begin to diminish (23–25).

ERG changes are known to be associated with significant visual disturbances (26). Interestingly, propionic acid derivatives such as ibuprofen have been reported to cause several ocular complications including blurring of vision and scotoma (9–11) as well as electrophysiologic changes of the visual evoked potential (12). Data of this study are also in accordance with reports of fewer ocular complications with other NSAID that are not propionic acid derivatives (5, 27).

The mechanisms responsible for the ERG changes caused by ibuprofen, naproxen, and flurbiprofen are not known. PGE₂ and PGI₂ have cytoprotective functions (28, 29) such that inhibition of their synthesis may conceivably result in alterations of retinal function; this, however, is unlikely because indomethacin and diclofenac also inhibited PG synthesis but did not alter the ERG (Table 2). Furthermore, ibuprofen produced ERG changes even after prior inhibition of PG synthesis by indomethacin. A role for deleterious free radicals in the observed ERG changes after the administration of propionic acid derivatives is also unlikely, because these agents may in fact act as effective free radical scavengers (30). A decrease in ocular circulation can cause changes in the ERG (31, 32);

Table 2. Retinal PG concentrations before and 1 h after saline and different NSAID

Treatment	Dose (μmol/kg)	PGF _{2α} (pmol/g protein)	PGE ₂ (pmol/g protein)	6-keto-PGF _{1α} (pmol/g protein)
None		88.5 ± 7.7	73.4 ± 12.4	56.6 ± 18.6
Saline		92.3 ± 8.6	82.5 ± 23.8	64.7 ± 12.9
Indomethacin	19.6	22.4 ± 7.1*	28.9 ± 6.8*	20.2 ± 4*
Diclofenac	15.7	9.4 ± 2.9*	51.6 ± 8.2*	11.3 ± 1.8*
Naproxen	79	22.9 ± 5.6*	25.5 ± 9.3*	24.2 ± 0.8*
Flurbiprofen	41	9.2 ± 4.6*	60.9 ± 21.2	12.1 ± 3.7*
Ibuprofen	48	90.4 ± 9.6	78 ± 12.7	16.5 ± 1.6*
Ibuprofen	194	19.1 ± 5.6*	18.7 ± 4.3*	15.3 ± 5.6*

Values are mean ± SEM; n = 3–4 for each treatment modality.

* p < 0.05 compared with saline and before treatment (none).

however, ibuprofen and naproxen do not affect basal retinal and choroidal blood flow (8) but rather improve ocular blood flow autoregulation (6). Effects of propionic acid derivatives on the ERG cannot also be attributed to an uncoupling of oxidative phosphorylation (26) because all NSAID can produce these effects, which are usually seen at high doses (33–36). However, propionic acid-derivative NSAID such as ibuprofen are more potent inhibitors of calcium channels than other NSAID (37). A greater inhibition of ocular calcium channels by ibuprofen, naproxen, and flurbiprofen than by indomethacin and diclofenac may be responsible for their adverse effects on the ERG. This, however, remains to be determined.

In conclusion, we describe for the first time that ibuprofen and other propionic acid derivatives, unlike other NSAID, significantly alter retinal function in the newborn by an effect that appears to be independent of PG. In an attempt to find NSAID that cause fewer complications than indomethacin in the newborn (38) and that are more effective than other antipyretics in the young infant (14, 15), the use of ibuprofen is being considered (13–15). However, in this context one must take into account the effects of ibuprofen and related drugs on the ERG, and these may also attest to other adverse effects such as those noted on renal function (13).

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