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1. Discuss in details the factors affecting drug metabolism.

Drug metabolism is the biotransformation /metabolic breakdown/chemical alteration of a drug to other molecular species usually called the metabolites, within the body via an enzymatic or non-enzymatic process. The primary site for drug metabolism is liver and other sites are kidney, intestine, lungs and plasma.



Metabolism of a drug may lead to:

* Inactivation: Most drugs get inactive due to metabolism. Eg. Ibuprofen, paracetamol.
* Active metabolite from an active drug: Eg. Codeine – morphine, primidone-Phenobarbitone.
* Activation of inactive drug: Eg. Levodopa- dopamine, prednisone-

Drugs can be metabolised by various pathways. Different factors can determine which pathway is used by a drug and to what extent the drug is metabolised by a particular pathway. The relative amount of any particular metabolite is determined by the concentration and activity of the enzymes responsible for the biotransformation as well as dose, frequency, route of administration, tissue distribution and protein binding of the drug. The rate of metabolism of a drug is particularly important for its pharmacological action as well as its toxicity. Factors affecting drug metabolism can be split into *internal factors* and *external factors*.

Internal:

* Species
* Genetic (strain )
* Age
* Sex
* Hormones
* Disease
* Enzyme induction and enzyme inhibition.

External:

* Diet
* Environment

**INTERNAL FACTORS**

**Species and Strain difference**

This has been observed in both Phase-1 and Phase-2 reactions. In Phase-1 reactions, both qualitative and quantitative variations in the enzyme and their activity have been observed. Qualitative differences among species generally result from the presence or absence of specific enzymes in those species. Quantitative differences result from variations in the amount and localization of enzymes, the amount of natural inhibitors, and the competition of enzymes for specific substrates.

Human liver contains less cytochrome P-450/gram of tissue than do the livers of other species. For example, rat liver contains approximately 30 to 50 nmol/g of Cytochrome P-450, whereas human liver contains 10 to 20 nmol/g. Furthermore, human liver is 2% of body weight, whereas rat liver is approximately 4%. Similarly, in men, amphetamine and ephedrine are predominantly metabolized by oxidative deamination, whereas in rats aromatic oxidation is the major route in Phase-II reactions. Similarly in pigs, the phenol is excreted mainly as glucuronide whereas its sulphate conjugate dominates in cats.

**Genetics (strain differences)**

Just as the difference in drug metabolising ability between different species is attributed to genetics, the differences are observed between strains of same species also. It may be studied under two headings:

* *Pharmacogenetics*: a study of inter-subject variability in drug response is called pharmacogenetics. The inter-subject variations in metabolism may either be monogenetically or polygenetically controlled. A polygenetic control is observed in twins.

In identical twins (monozygotic), very little or no difference in metabolism of halothane,

Phenylbutazone, dicoumaral and antipyrine were detected but large variations were observed in fraternal twins (dizygotic).

* *Ethnic variations:* differences observed in the metabolism of drug among different races are called ethnic variations. Such variations may be monomorphic or polymorphic.

Example: Succinyl choline, which is a skeletal muscle relaxant, is metabolized by pseudocholine esterase. Some people lack this enzyme, due to which lack of metabolism of succinyl choline might occur. When administered in those individuals, prolonged *Apnea*might result. Different groups of populations might be classified as fast metabolizers and poor metabolizers of drugs. For drugs, like Isoniazid, fast acetylators as well as slow acetylators are present. Fast acetylators cause rapid acetylation, while poor metabolizers metabolize less. Hepatic acetyl transferrase catalyzes acetylation. Slow acetylation might occur due to genetic malformation leading to decreased production.

**Age**

The drug metabolic rate in the different age groups differs mainly due to variations in the enzyme content, enzyme activity and haemodynamics.

In neonates (up to 2 months) and in infants (2 months to 1 year), the microsomal enzyme system is not fully developed (gastric pH is high**,** intestinal surface is low, blood flow to GIT is low). So, many drugs are metabolized slowly. For eg: caffeine has a half-life of 4 days in neonates in comparison to 4 hours in adults.

* Children (between 1 year and 12 years) metabolize several drugs much more rapidly than adults as the rate of metabolism reaches a maximum somewhere between 6 months and 12 years. As a result they require large mg/kg dose in comparison to adults.
* In elderly persons, the liver size is reduced, the microsomal enzyme activity is decreased and hepatic blood flow also declines as a result of reduced cardiac output, all of which contributes to decreased metabolism of drugs. For example, chlomethiazole shows a high bioavailability within the elderly, therefore they require a lower dose.

**Sex difference**

Since variations between male and female are observed following puberty. So, sex related differences in the rate of metabolism may be due to sex hormones. Such sex differences are widely studied in rats where male rats have greater drug metabolizing capacity. In humans, women metabolize benzodiazepines slowly than men. Several studies have shown that women on contraceptive pills metabolize a number of drugs at a slow rate.

**Hormones**

Higher level of one hormone may inhibit the activity of few enzymes while inducing that of others. Adrenolectomy, thyroidectomy and alloxan-induced diabetes in animals showed impairment in the enzyme activity with subsequent fall in the rate of metabolism. A similar effect was also observed in the pituitary growth hormone and stress related changes in ACTH levels.

**Diseases**

There are many diseases that affect the metabolism of drugs. Some of them are cirrhosis of liver, alcoholic liver disease, cholestatic jaundice, diabetes mellitus, acromegaly, malaria and various bacterial and viral infections, etc. It can be seen that major effects are seen in the disease affecting liver as liver is quantitatively the important site for metabolism. The possible cause in the effect of metabolism due to diseases may be:

* Decreased enzyme activity in liver.
* Altered hepatic blood flow.
* Hypoalbuminaemia (leading to lower plasma binding of drugs).

For example: glycine conjugation of salicylates, oxidation of Vitamin D and hydrolysis of procaine are impaired in kidney diseases.

**Enzyme induction**:

The phenomenon of increased drug metabolizing ability of enzymes by several drugs and chemicals is called as enzyme induction and the agents which bring about such an effect are called enzyme inducers.

*Mechanisms of enzyme induction*:

* Increase in both liver size and liver blood flow.
* Increase in both total and microsomal protein content.
* Increased stability of enzymes.
* Increased stability of cytochrome P-450.
* Decreased degradation of cytochrome P-450.
* Proliferation of smooth endoplasmic reticulum.

*Consequences of enzyme induction include*:

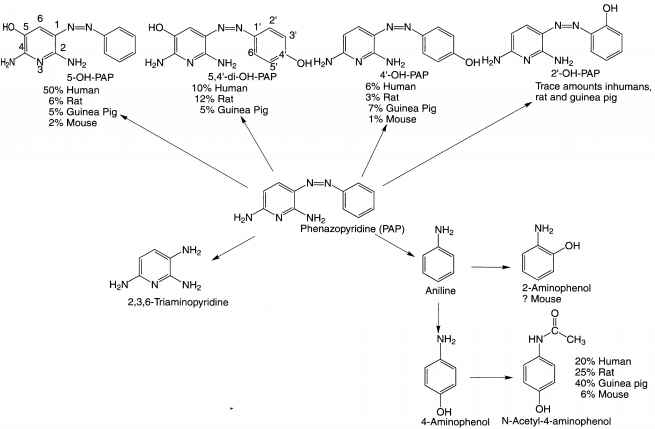
* Decrease in pharmacological activity of drugs.
* Increased activity where the metabolites are active.
* Altered physiological status due to enhanced metabolism of endogenous compounds such as sex hormones.

**Enzyme inhibition**

It is a decrease in the drug metabolizing ability of an enzyme. The process of inhibition may be direct or indirect.

* Direct inhibition: It may result from interaction at the enzymic site, the net outcome being a change in enzyme activity. Direct enzyme inhibition can occur by one of the following mechanisms:
* Competitive inhibition: occurs when structurally similar compounds compete for the same site on an enzyme.
* Non-competitive inhibition: occur when a structurally unrelated agent interacts with the enzyme and prevents the metabolism of drugs.
* Product inhibition: occurs when the metabolic product competes with the substrate for the same enzyme.
* Indirect inhibition: it is caused by one of the following mechanism:
* Repression: it may be due to fall in the rate of enzyme synthesis or rise in the rate of enzyme degradation.
* Altered physiology: it may be due to nutritional deficiency or hormonal imbalance.

Enzyme inhibition is more important clinically than enzyme induction particularly for drugs with narrow therapeutic index. Eg: anticoagulants, antiepileptics, hypoglycemias, etc



**EXTERNAL FACTORS**

**Diet**

The enzyme content and activity is altered by a number of dietary components. Generally, low protein diet decreases and high protein diet increases the drug metabolizing ability as enzyme synthesis is promoted by protein diet and also raises the level of amino acids for conjugation with drugs. Fat free diet depresses cytochrome P-450 levels since phospholipids, which are important components of microsomes become deficient. Grapefruit inhibits metabolism of many drugs and improve their oral bioavailability. Dietary deficiency of vitamins like Vitamin A, B2, B3, C and E) and minerals such as Fe, Ca, Mg, Zn retard the metabolic activity of enzymes. Starvation results in decreased amount of glucuronides formed than under normal conditions.

**Environment**

Several environmental agents influence the drug metabolizing ability of enzymes. Eg:

* Halogenated pesticides such as DDT and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons contained in cigarette smoke have enzyme induction effect.
* Organophosphate insecticides and heavy metals such as mercury, nickel, cobalt and arsenic inhibit drug metabolizing ability of enzymes.
* Other environmental factors that may influence drug metabolism are temperature, altitude, pressure, atmosphere, etc.

**Altered physiological factors**

* **Pregnancy**

This is known to affect hepatic drug metabolism. Physiological changes during pregnancy are probably responsible for the reported alteration in drug metabolism. These include elevated concentrations of various hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, placental growth hormones and prolactin. For example: in women, the metabolism of promazine and pethidine is reduced during pregnancy.

It was also confirmed by the study in animals. In pregnant Sprague-Dawley rats, hexobarbital biotransformation indicated unchanged or slightly elevated microsomal enzyme activity compared to normal rats.

The therapeutic efficacy, toxicity and biological half-life of a drug greatly depend on the metabolism of the drug and a number of factors affect the metabolism of the drug. Hence various factors affecting drug metabolism must be considered during administration and also in proper dosing of any drug to the patients.