Journal of Population Therapeutics& Clinical Pharmacology

RESEARCH ARTICLE
DOI: 10.53555/jptcp.v31i5.7086

ANTI-INFLAMMATORY EFFECTS OF FATTY ACIDS AND THEIR METABOLITES IN RESOLVING INFLAMMATION IN CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE: A CROSS-OVER STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: 'Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is marked by chronic inflammation'. Fatty acids and their derivatives have demonstrated potential anti-inflammatory effects. This study aims to explore the anti-inflammatory effects of fatty acids and their metabolites in COPD patients using a cross-over 'study design'.

Methods: 'A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled cross-over study was conducted' at Gomal Medical College D.I Khan with 200 COPD patients. 'Participants were randomly assigned to receive either fatty acid supplements or placebo capsules for 8 weeks, followed by a 4-week washout period, then switched to the alternate treatment'. Inflammatory markers (CRP, IL-6, TNF-α), lung function tests (FEV1, FVC), symptom scores (CAT), and quality of life (SGRQ) were evaluated at baseline and after each intervention phase.

Results: Fatty acid supplementation led to significant reductions in inflammatory markers comparedto placebo. There were also improvements in symptom scores and quality of life.

Conclusion: Fatty acids and their metabolites might contribute to reducing inflammation and improving clinical outcomes in COPD patients.

Introduction

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a significant global health issue, affecting millions of people worldwide and leading to considerable morbidity and mortality. It is a 'chronic inflammatory lung disease characterized by persistent respiratory symptoms and airflow limitation

due to airway and/or alveolar abnormalities, typically caused by significant exposure to noxious particles or gases' (1). The chronic inflammation in COPD leads to structural changes and narrowing of the small airways, and in some cases, destruction of the lung parenchyma, resulting in emphysema (2, 3).

This inflammation is a key driver of the disease process, contributing to exacerbations, progression of the disease, and a decline in lung function (4). Standard treatments for COPD primarily aim to alleviate symptoms and prevent exacerbations through the use of bronchodilators, corticosteroids, and lifestyle modifications such as smoking cessation. However, these treatments often do not fully address the underlying inflammatory processes driving the disease (5, 6).

'In recent years, there has been growing interest in the potential therapeutic roles of dietary interventions, particularly the use of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), in managing chronic inflammatory diseases such as COPD. Omega-3 PUFAs, including eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), are known for their anti-inflammatory properties' (7, 8). These fatty acids are precursors to 'specialized pro-resolving lipid mediators (SPMs), which activelypromote the resolution of inflammation'. SPMs, such as resolvins, protectins, and maresins, play a crucial role in dampening inflammatory responses by reducing cytokine production, inhibitingleukocyte infiltration, and enhancing the clearance of apoptotic cells and debris (9).

Despite promising preliminary findings, the clinical efficacy and mechanisms by which omega-3 PUFAs and their metabolites exert their anti-inflammatory effects in COPD remain under investigation(10). This study aims to explore these potential benefits through a rigorous, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled cross-over design to provide more definitive evidence on the role of fatty acids in reducing inflammation and improving clinical outcomes in COPD patients.

Methodology

The study was conducted at Gomal Medical College D.I Khan and the 'study design employed a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled cross-over design to evaluate the effects of fatty acids and their metabolites on inflammation in COPD patients'. A cross-over design was chosen to minimize inter-individual variability and enhance the statistical power of the study.

The study enrolled 200 COPD patients. Inclusion criteria included: Diagnosis of 'COPD according to Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) criteria with age between 40 and 75years and Stable condition without exacerbations' requiring antibiotics or systemic steroids in the past4 weeks. Ability to provide informed consent.

Exclusion criteria included Significant concomitant respiratory diseases such as asthma or bronchiectasis. Current smokers or those who quit smoking less than 6 months ago. Use of anti-inflammatory medications (e.g., corticosteroids, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) within 4 weeks before study enrollment.

Two groups were assigned randomly:

- **Group A:** Received fatty acid supplements containing omega-3 fatty acids (eicosapentaenoic acidand docosahexaenoic acid) at a dose of daily for 8 'weeks, followed by a 4-week washout period, thencrossed over to receive placebo capsules identical in appearance for another 8 weeks'.
- **Group B:** Received placebo capsules for 8 weeks, followed by a 4-week washout period, then crossed over to receive fatty acid supplements for 8 weeks.

The supplements and placebos were provided in identical capsules to ensure the blinding of participants and investigators.

Assessments Primary Outcome Measures: Changes in inflammatory markers including C-reactiveprotein (CRP), interleukin-6 (IL-6), and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α) were assessed at baseline and the end of each 8-week intervention period. **Secondary Outcome Measures:** Lung function tests were conducted using spirometry to measure forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV1) and forced vital capacity (FVC). Symptom severity and impact on quality of life were assessed using the COPD Assessment Test (CAT) and St. George's Respiratory Questionnaire

(SGRQ), respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using appropriate methods (e.g., paired t-tests, analysis of variance) to compare changes in outcomes between fatty acid supplementation and placebo phases. Results were expressed as 'mean ± standard deviation (SD) for continuous variables and frequencies (%) for categorical variables. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant'.

Results

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Group A (n=100)	Group B (n=100)	Total (n=200)
Age (years), mean (SD)	65 (7.2)	66 (6.8)	65.5 (7.0)
Male, n (%)	60 (60%)	58 (58%)	118 (59%)
FEV1 (% predicted), mean (SD)	45 (15)	46 (14)	45.5 (14.5)
Current smokers, n (%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
CRP (mg/L), mean (SD)	10 (3.5)	10.5 (3.8)	10.25 (3.65)
IL-6 (pg/mL), mean (SD)	8 (2.5)	8.2 (2.6)	8.1 (2.55)
TNF-α (pg/mL), mean (SD)	6 (1.8)	6.1 (1.7)	6.05 (1.75)

The baseline characteristics of the participants in both groups were similar, indicating successful randomization and comparability of the groups at the study's start.

Table 2: Changes in Inflammatory Markers After Interventions

Inflammatory Marker	Baseline (mean ± SD)	Post Fatty Acid Supplement (mean ± SD)	Post Placebo (mean ± SD)	p- value
CRP (mg/L)	10.25 ± 3.65	6.8 ± 2.9	9.5 ± 3.4	<0.001
IL-6 (pg/mL)	8.1 ± 2.55	5.5 ± 2.2	7.8 ± 2.5	<0.001
TNF-α (pg/mL)	6.05 ± 1.75	4.2 ± 1.5	5.8 ± 1.7	<0.001

There were significant reductions in CRP, IL-6, and TNF-α following fatty acid supplementation compared to placebo, indicating a strong anti-inflammatory effect of fatty acids in COPD patients.

Table 3: Changes in Lung Function and Symptom Scores

Parameter	Baseline (mean ± SD)	Post Fatty Acid Supplement (mean ± SD)	Post Placebo (mean ± SD)	p- value
FEV1 (% predicted)	45.5 ± 14.5	47 ± 13.5	45.7 ± 14.3	0.08
FVC (% predicted)	55.5 ± 15.2	56.2 ± 14.7	55.8 ± 15.1	0.12
Symptom Score (CAT)	18 ± 4.5	14 ± 3.8	17 ± 4.3	<0.001
Quality of Life (SGRQ)	50 ± 12	42 ± 10	48 ± 11	<0.001

While there were improvements in lung function parameters (FEV1 and FVC) following fatty acid supplementation, these changes were not statistically significant. However, significant improvements were observed in symptom scores (CAT) and quality of life (SGRQ), suggesting that fatty acids mayenhance overall well-being.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate 'that fatty acids and their metabolites have a beneficial anti-inflammatory effect' in COPD patients, evidenced by significant reductions in inflammatory markers such as CRP, IL-6, and TNF-α. These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as Calder

(2017) and Bachmair et al. (2020), which showed that omega-3 fatty acids can significantly reduce inflammatory cytokine production and systemic inflammation in patients with chronic inflammatory diseases, including COPD (11). Similarly, Duvall et al. (2018) reported a significant decrease in CRP levels and some improvement in lung function in COPD patients following fish oil supplementation (12).

However, some studies have reported contrasting findings. Matsuyama et al. (2015) found no significant changes in inflammatory markers or lung function with omega-3 fatty acid supplementation in COPD patients, potentially due to differences in study design, duration, or population characteristics (13). Stevenson et al. (2022) also reported only modest reductions in inflammation, which were not statistically significant, suggesting patient heterogeneity might influence outcomes (14). Additionally, Zhu et al. (2020), in their meta-analysis, concluded that while there is some evidence for the anti-inflammatory 'effects of omega-3 fatty acids, the overall impact on clinical outcomes and lung function in' COPD remains inconclusive (15).

These mixed results highlight the complexity of COPD and the need for personalized approaches in dietary interventions (16, 17). While our study supports the potential anti-inflammatory benefits of fatty acids, the variability in outcomes across different studies indicates that further research is needed. Future studies should aim to elucidate the specific 'mechanisms by which fatty acids exert their effects and identify the subgroups of COPD patients who may benefit the most from such interventions'.

Conclusion

This cross-over study provides evidence supporting the potential 'anti-inflammatory effects of fatty acids and their metabolites in COPD patients'. Our findings indicate significant reductions in inflammatory markers CRP, IL-6, and TNF-α following omega-3 fatty acid supplementation, suggesting a beneficial impact on systemic inflammation in COPD. However, conflicting results from other studies underscore the variability in treatment response among COPD patients and the need forpersonalized therapeutic approaches.

Future research should focus on elucidating the underlying mechanisms of fatty acid action in COPD, refining patient selection criteria, and conducting larger, long-term studies to establish the clinical efficacy of omega-3 fatty acids in managing inflammation and improving outcomes in COPD. Addressing these gaps will be crucial in harnessing the full therapeutic potential of dietary interventions with fatty acids in COPD management.

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