Intraocular irrigating solutions and barrier function of retinal pigment epithelium

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Abstract

Aim—To study the effect of intraocular irrigating solutions on the barrier property of the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE).

Methods—The isolated rabbit RPE–choroid mounted on Ussing-type chambers under short circuit conditions was used. According to a previous study, the inward (from the choroid to the vitreous side) permeability of the tissue to carboxyfluorescein was adopted as a quantitative index of the barrier function of the RPE cells.

Results—Of the three solutions tested, Krebs–Ringer solution, a commercially available glucose glutathione bicarbonate solution (BSS plus), and glucose citrate–acetate bicarbonate solution (Opeguard), BSS plus gave a significantly lower permeability (1.1 × 10⁻⁶ cm/s on average) than Krebs–Ringer solution or Opeguard (1.9 or 1.8 × 10⁻⁶ cm/s on average, respectively) (unpaired t test with Bonferroni’s correction, p<0.05). Since the major chemical difference between BSS plus and the other two solutions is the incorporation of oxidised glutathione (GSSG), the effects of GSSG were studied using solutions having an identical composition to BSS plus, but with various concentrations of GSSG. The solution containing 0.3 mM GSSG gave significantly lower permeability than that without GSSG (1.1 × 10⁻⁶ cm/s vs 2.0 × 10⁻⁶ cm/s) (unpaired t test with Bonferroni’s correction, p<0.05).

Conclusion—It was suggested that BSS plus is less harmful to the barrier function of the RPE cells and that GSSG has a beneficial effect on its maintenance.

Table 1  Chemical composition of solutions examined (mmol/l)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituent</th>
<th>BSS plus</th>
<th>S-MA2</th>
<th>Krebs-Ringer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sodium chloride</td>
<td>122.2</td>
<td>112.9</td>
<td>118.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium chloride</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium chloride</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnesium chloride</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnesium sulphate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium phosphate</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium bicarbonate</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glucose</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium acetate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium citrate</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxidised glutathione</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmolality (mOsm)</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are mean (SD) in seven experiments.

*Permeability of isolated RPE–choroid to carboxyfluorescein.
†Between group difference was significant at p<0.05 (unpaired t test with Bonferroni’s correction for multiple comparison).
‡Between group difference was significant at p<0.01 (unpaired t test with Bonferroni’s correction for multiple comparison).

Results

COMPARISON AMONG KREBS–RINGER SOLUTION, S-MA2, AND BSS PLUS

The addition of carboxyfluorescein at 300 µM caused no significant effects on osmolality or pH of the solutions. The SCC reached a steady state in 30 minutes and the addition of carboxyfluorescein showed no significant effect on the SCC. The transepithelial potential difference and the tissue resistance showed no significant change during the experiment and no significant difference was seen in the transepithelial potential difference or the tissue resistance among the three solutions (Table 2).

The obtained inward permeabilities are summarised in Table 2. The inward permeability obtained with BSS plus was significantly lower than that obtained with Krebs–Ringer solution or S-MA2 (unpaired t test with Aspin–Welch correction for unequal variance and Bonferroni’s correction for multiple comparison, p<0.05). There was no significant difference between the inward permeability obtained with Krebs–Ringer solution and that obtained with S-MA2.

EFFECT OF GSSG CONCENTRATION ADDED

The transepithelial potential difference and the tissue resistance showed no significant change during the experiment and no significant difference was seen in the transepithelial potential difference or the tissue resistance among the three solutions (Table 3). The inward permeabilities obtained are summarised in Table 3. The inward permeability obtained with BSS plus was significantly lower than that obtained with BSS plus without GSSG (unpaired t test with Aspin-Welch correction for unequal variance and Bonferroni’s correction for multiple comparison, p<0.05), while it showed no significant difference from that obtained with BSS plus with 0.1 mM GSSG.

Discussion

According to our previous study,13 unlike the isolated dog RPE–choroid,14 determination of the inward permeability to carboxyfluorescein in the isolated rabbit RPE–choroid is little affected by the outward (from the vitreous to the choroid side) active transport of carboxyfluorescein, and the inward permeability obtained using the present preparation is thought to almost exclusively reflect the diffusion of the
dye through paracellular spaces. The rabbit is cheaper to obtain and better suited for extensive studies. Further, since the effects of intraocular irrigating solutions on the barrier function of the corneal endothelium and the blood-aqueous barrier (BAB) have also been studied in rabbit eyes, the results obtained for the RPE can be directly compared with those obtained for the corneal endothelium and the BAB in the same species. In the present study, the transepithelial potential difference presently recorded was 4–5 mV (retinal side positive) and lower than those recorded in the RPE–choroid sclera preparation from the rabbit, while the transepithelial electrical resistance was similar to that reported for the RPE–choroid preparations from dog or sheep. These results suggest that the present experimental condition may not be a perfect replication of the in vivo state of functioning of the RPE cells but the damage, if it existed, would not be serious, and that the present preparation can be used for studying effects of various intraocular irrigating solutions, as long as comparisons are carried out under the same conditions.

BSS plus or another glucose glutathione bicarbonate solution, glutathione bicarbonate Ringer (GBR), has been consistently found to be less harmful than S-MA2 or Krebs–Ringer solution, giving a lower permeability of isolated RPE–choroid to carboxyfluorescein (Table 3). The permeability was determined using three solutions containing various concentrations of BSS plus: commercially available BSS plus, BSS plus without GSSG, or BSS plus with 0.1 mM GSSG. The permeability obtained using BSS plus without GSSG averaged 2.0 × 10⁻⁶ cm/s. This value was similar to that obtained using S-MA2 or Krebs-Ringer solution, 1.8 and 1.9 × 10⁻⁶ cm/s, respectively, but significantly greater than that obtained using BSS plus. On the other hand, the value obtained using BSS plus with 0.1 mM GSSG was not significantly different from that obtained using BSS plus. These findings suggest that as far as the permeability of the isolated RPE–choroid to carboxyfluorescein is concerned, absence of GSSG was mainly responsible for the higher value obtained using S-MA2 or Krebs–Ringer solution.

Although the basis for the currently observed effect of GSSG remains conjectural, it may be related to the glutathione redox system which is involved in the protection of –SH groups in enzymes and membranes. In ocular tissues, it was reported that the redox state of glutathione in the corneal endothelial cells played a role in the maintenance of its barrier function. Riley reported that a glutathione reductase inhibitor, BCNU, in the medium damaged the barrier function of the corneal endothelium rather than its active transporting function and that the addition of reduced glutathione, GSH, but not GSSG, protected the observed damage. Anderson et al reported that exogenous GSSG rather than GSH is responsible for the increased corneal desiccation and the effect of BCNU was inhibited by perfusion with a solution containing 0.1 mM GSSG. Cultured human RPE cells contain GSH, and glutathione peroxidase activity is present in the rabbit RPE cells. Exogenous GSH of 0.01 mM or higher is reported to provide protection for cultured human RPE cells against oxidative injury. Although its exact mechanism is unclear at the present time, it may be possible that GSSG in the intraocular irrigating solution exerted a beneficial effect on the intracellular redox state of glutathione and consequently a beneficial effect on the maintenance of the barrier properties of the RPE cells.

Surgical outcome of vitrectomy is determined by many factors and the effect of the barrier function of the RPE cells on it is certainly only minimal, if any. The corneal endothelium irrigated with S-MA2 showed

### Table 3 Effect of oxidised glutathione (GSSG) concentration in solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>Transepithelial potential difference (mV)</th>
<th>Tissue resistance (Ω·cm²)</th>
<th>Permeability* (×10⁻⁶ cm/s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSS plus (0.3 mM GSSG)</td>
<td>142 (39)</td>
<td>4.4 (1.1)</td>
<td>1.08 (0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSS plus (0.1 mM GSSG)</td>
<td>119 (33)</td>
<td>5.1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1.22 (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSS plus (without GSSG)</td>
<td>123 (35)</td>
<td>4.2 (1.4)</td>
<td>2.00 (0.70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are mean (SD) in seven experiments.  
*Permeability of isolated RPE–choroid to carboxyfluorescein.  
†Between group difference was significant at p<0.05 (un Paired t test with Aspin-Welch's correction for unequal variance and Bonferroni's correction).
20% higher permeability to carboxyfluorescein than that irrigated with BSS plus. In a randomised clinical trial, BSS plus was found to cause significantly less corneal swelling on the first postoperative day than did S-MA2, in eyes that had undergone extracapsular cataract extraction with posterior chamber lens implantation. Further, the eyes operated using S-MA2 showed significantly more postoperative loss and deterioration of morphological characteristics in the corneal endothelial cells. These findings in the above cited clinical study suggest that 20% deterioration of the barrier property may imply not only change in the intercellular structures, but also considerable damage in the cell function itself, as far as the corneal endothelium is concerned. In the present experiment, the RPE cells irrigated with S-MA2 or BSS plus without GSSG showed 70% higher permeability to carboxyfluorescein than those irrigated with BSS plus with GSSG. The above results obtained in the corneal endothelium suggest that irrigation with these GSSG-free solutions may cause considerable damage not only to the blood–ocular barrier, but also to other physiological functions of the RPE cells. The use of BSS plus may be preferable and safer, especially in eyes where subretinal procedures are needed during vitrectomy.