Effects of vitamin E and soybean oil supplementation on sperm parameters in male Sprague-Dawley rats

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Abstract. This study was performed to determine the effects of dietary vitamin E and soybean oil (a rich source of polyunsaturated fatty acids) on the sperm concentration and motility in male Sprague-Dawley rats. Rats with body weights between 250 – 300 gms were randomly allotted into five treatment groups with three animals each. The trial lasted 63 weeks inclusive of a one week acclimatization period. Rats were fed either CTRL (Base Diet + 5 % Soybean Oil + 3000 IU Vitamin E), BD Only (Base Diet Only), BDvitE (Base Diet + 3000 IU Vitamin E Only), BDSBO (Base Diet + Soybean Oil Only) or COMM (Imported Commercial Rat Pellets). At the end of the trial, the rats were euthanized and sperm concentration and motility were evaluated for both left and right testicles. It was found that although sperm motility had no significant difference across treatment groups, animals supplemented with adequate vitamin E and soybean oils had significantly higher concentration of sperms. It was also shown that vitamin E supplementation alone is more important than dietary fat supplementation in influencing sperm concentration in rats.

INTRODUCTION

Antioxidants played an important role in laboratory rat reproduction (Das et al., 2006). Antioxidants including vitamin E have been shown to improve sperm motility and enhances semen quality and fertility of rats (Yousef et al., 2003). In recent years, vitamin E supplements have been widely used in rats diets and the levels for enhancing production, and reproductive performance have been increased several fold (Chinoy & Sharma, 1998). Supplementation with Vitamin E has also been shown to increase total sperm output and sperm concentration (Sonmez et al., 2007) in boars and poultry. Other studies have found improvements in sperm quantity and quality with supplemental Vitamins C and E (Cerolini et al., 2006). Apart from the protective effects of Vitamin E on membrane integrity that safeguarded cellular functions (Yousef et al., 2003), membrane fluidity is also an important determinant of normal cell functions. The membrane fluidity of sperm membrane is mainly dependent on lipid constitution and the degree of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) unsaturation. A higher degree of unsaturation of PUFA in the spermatozoa membrane was also shown to affect sperm quantity and concentration (Lenzi et al. 1996). However, the alteration of the cellular membrane fluidity could take significant amounts of time depending on treatment regime (Gurr et al., 2002). In fact, most of the trials assessing the effects of vitamin E and fats in the literature involved shorter time frame as compared to the current trial. In view of the long term effects of both vitamin E and PUFA on sperm production and motility, therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate the effects of vitamins E and PUFA (from soybean oil) supplementation on sperm motility and sperm concentration in male Sprague Dawley rats.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of 15 male Sprague-Dawley rats weighing between 250-300gms were obtained from the Laboratory Animal Resource Unit, Institute for Medical Research (IMR) Kuala Lumpur. The entire trial lasted 63 weeks inclusive of a 1-week acclimatization period. These rats were randomly assigned into five groups of three animals each. All the rats in this study were housed individually in plastic polycarbonate cages. These cages were placed on stainless steel racks and housed in naturally ventilated experimental rooms with temperature and humidity of about 30ºC and 70% relative humidity respectively, with 12 hours light and dark cycles. These animals were fed with their respective diets for the trial at 20gms/day and water was available ad libitum. The feed as well as the water intake was recorded daily using an electronic weighing balance. Treatment diets were created by adding 5% (w/w) soybean oil and/or vitamin E supplement at 3000 IU (Blackmore’s, Australia) to a Base Diet. Soybean oil was chosen as its PUFA is relatively stable to oxidation and therefore does not quench the vitamin E supplemented in the diet significantly (Gunstone, 1996). The Base Diet used in this study was deficient in both fats and vitamin E (<260 IU), and had the following macronutrient composition (as % dry weight): protein (18.8%), crude fibre (5.0%), crude fat (<3.0%), ash (8.0%) and the rest are made up of non-protein nitrogen. The treatment diet groups were CTRL (Base Diet + 5% Soybean Oil + 3000 IU vitamin E), BD Only (Base Diet Only), BDVitE (Base Diet + 3000 IU vitamin E only), BDSBO (Base Diet + Soybean Oil only) and COMM (imported commercial rat pellets – A balanced and complete diet for rats).

Upon termination of the trial, the rats were euthanized and sperm samples were obtained from both left and right vas deferens to analyze for percentage progressive motility (PPM). Sperm concentration was then determined by counting the cells on a hemacytometer as described by Seed et al. (1996). All procedures for the trial was approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee, Ministry of Health Malaysia, approval no. ACUC/KKM/02(3/2006)(6). Datasets were checked for conformance to normality, and then analysed using a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure for the effects of PUFA and vitamin E supplementation on sperm concentration and motility. Significantly different means were then elucidated using the Duncan’s Multiple Range Test (DMRT). All test were conducted at 95 % confidence level using SPSS 14.0 software (SPSS Inc. Illionois).

RESULTS

In general, sperm motility was not significantly different across group. However, treatment groups supplemented with sufficient levels of vitamin E and fats, such as COMM and CTRL diets tend to have higher concentration of sperms. It was also noted that Vitamin E supplementation alone resulted in significantly higher sperm concentration as compared to fat (or soybean oil) supplementation alone. These findings further underscore the importance of vitamin E in the reproductive functions in rats. Groups that received little or no vitamin E supplementation were shown to have a lower sperm concentration as indicated by groups BD and BDSBO in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that sperm motility was not significantly different across the groups. This may be due to the large discrepancy in PPM values within treatment groups as indicated by their large standard error of means. The association of vitamin E deficiency with impaired male reproduction has been established for more than three decades, and traditionally it is called the ‘anti-sterility’ vitamin (Uzunhisarcikli et al., 2007). In the rats, vitamin E prevents lipid peroxidation of spermatozoa (Rao & Sharma, 2001). Uzunhisarcikli et al. (2007) reported that vitamin E ameliorates oxidative stress in spermatozoa helping to maintain optimum fertilizing ability. In addition, vitamin E is
believed to be the primary components of the antioxidant system of the spermatozoa (Wang et al., 2007), and is one of the major membrane protectants against reactive oxygen species (ROS) and lipid peroxidation (Yousef et al., 2003). Therefore it was not surprising that vitamin E contributed significantly to the higher sperm concentration observed for groups COMM, BDVitE and CTRL. In contrast, fat supplementation, particularly those of the reactive n-6 fatty acids could be detrimental if it is done without antioxidant supplementation (Gunstone, 1996).

Vitamin E is an important determinant of sperm parameters in the rat. Supplementation of reactive fat types should be done in tandem with adequate amounts of antioxidants to ameliorate potential adverse effects due to lipid peroxidation.

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REFERENCES


Table 1. Sperm motility and concentration after 62 weeks of treatment (Mean ± Standard Error of Means)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment groups</th>
<th>Sperm motility (Mean ± S.E.M. PPM)*</th>
<th>Sperm Count (Mean ± S.E.M. x 10^6 cells/mL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CTRL</td>
<td>82.9 ± 10.5</td>
<td>35.5 ± 6.2abc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>76.5 ± 14.7</td>
<td>28.6 ± 3.1ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDVitE</td>
<td>78.1 ± 6.9</td>
<td>40.6 ± 4.8bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDSBO</td>
<td>87.1 ± 6.8</td>
<td>25.9 ± 2.1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM</td>
<td>93.2 ± 3.2</td>
<td>43.2 ± 3.4c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means with different superscripts within column differed significantly at P<0.05; *= Not Significant


