Glimepiride, a Novel Sulfonylurea, Does Not Abolish Myocardial Protection Afforded by Either Ischemic Preconditioning or Diazoxide

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Background—The sulfonylurea glibenclamide (Glib) abolishes the cardioprotective effect of ischemic preconditioning (IP), presumably by inhibiting mitochondrial K\textsubscript{ATP} channel opening in myocytes. Glimepiride (Glim) is a new sulfonylurea reported to affect nonpancreatic K\textsubscript{ATP} channels less than does Glib. We examined the effects of Glim on IP and on the protection afforded by diazoxide (Diaz), an opener of mitochondrial K\textsubscript{ATP} channels.

Methods and Results—Rat hearts were Langendorff-perfused, subjected to 35 minutes of regional ischemia and 120 minutes of reperfusion, and assigned to 1 of the following treatment groups: (1) control; (2) IP of 2 × 5 minutes each of global ischemia before lethal ischemia; or pretreatment with (3) 30 μmol/L Diaz, (4) 10 μmol/L Glim, (5) 10 μmol/L Glib, (6) IP + Glim, (7) IP + Glib, (8) Diaz + Glim, or (9) Diaz + Glib. IP limited infarct size (18.5 ± 1% vs 43.7 ± 3% in control, P < 0.01) as did Diaz (22.2 ± 4.7%, P < 0.01). The protective actions of IP or Diaz were not abolished by Glim (18.5 ± 3% in IP + Glim, 22.3 ± 3% in Diaz + Glim; P < 0.01 vs control). However, Glib abolished the infarct-limiting effects of IP and Diaz. Patch-clamp studies in isolated rat ventricular myocytes confirmed that both Glim and Glib (each at 1 μmol/L) blocked sarcolemmal K\textsubscript{ATP} currents. However, in isolated cardiac mitochondria, Glim (10 μmol/L) failed to block the effects of K\textsubscript{ATP} opening by GTP, in contrast to the blockade caused by Glib.

Conclusions—Although it blocks sarcolemmal currents in rat cardiac myocytes, Glim does not block the beneficial effects of mitochondrial K\textsubscript{ATP} channel opening in the isolated rat heart. These data may have significant implications for the treatment of type 2 diabetes in patients with ongoing ischemic heart disease. (Circulation. 2001;103:3111-3116.)

Key Words: potassium • myocardial infarction • diabetes mellitus • ion channels

Sulfonylureas are drugs used in the treatment of type 2 diabetes. They inhibit ATP-sensitive potassium (K\textsubscript{ATP}) channels, which induce membrane depolarization and an influx of calcium in pancreatic β-cells. Calcium acts as a second messenger, accounting for insulin release into the bloodstream. However, it has been suggested that classic sulfonylureas such as tolbutamide and glibenclamide (also known as glyburide) may have adverse effects on the cardiovascular system, mainly because they also close mitochondrial K\textsubscript{ATP} channels, thought to play a central role in ischemic preconditioning (IP) protection.1-3

Glimepiride is a newer sulfonylurea derivative demonstrated to have fewer cardiac actions than other sulfonylureas in both animal4 and human5 studies. For example, Geisen et al6 showed that glimepiride blocked K\textsubscript{ATP} currents in isolated rat cardiomyocytes at a concentration 5-fold higher than glibenclamide. There are also data providing indirect evidence that glibenclamide, but not glimepiride, prevents preconditioning in humans subjected to balloon angioplasty.6 If glimepiride has fewer cardiac actions than other sulfonylureas, then this would have important implications for its preferred use in the treatment of patients with type 2 diabetes with concurrent coronary artery disease.

The aim of this study was to compare the effect of glimepiride and the more conventionally used sulfonylurea glibenclamide on IP protection and on the protection afforded by one of the preconditioning mimetic agents, diazoxide. Diazoxide is a K\textsubscript{ATP} channel opener exhibiting selectivity for mitochondrial K\textsubscript{ATP} channels at concentrations up to 30 μmol/L.7 In this study, we used infarct size as the end point of injury, because this measure is a robust indicator of preconditioning-induced protection. We also assessed the effect of glimepiride and glibenclamide directly on sarcolemmal K\textsubscript{ATP} channel currents in isolated ventricular myocytes in addition to their effect on membrane potential in isolated cardiac mitochondria.
were perfused with 10 mmol/L glucose. All solutions were filtered through a Whatman 2.0-
macerate in ice-cold buffer, and mounted on a constant-pressure
reperfusion period the snare was tightened to reocluse the coronary artery, and a saline solution of 0.12% Evans blue was infused slowly by way of the aorta. This procedure delineated the nonischemic zone of the myocardium as a dark blue area. After 1 to 4 hours at –20°C, hearts were sliced into 1-mm-thick transverse sections and incubated in triphenyltetrazolium chloride solution (1% in phosphate buffer, pH 7.4) at 37°C for 10 to 15 minutes. The tissue slices were then fixed in 10% formalin. At the end of this procedure, in the risk zone the viable tissue was stained red and the infarcted tissue appeared pale. The slices were drawn onto acetate sheets. With the use of a computerized planimetry package (Summa Sketch II, Summagraphics), the percentage of infarcted tissue within the volume of myocardium at risk was calculated.

In the presence of 5-hydroxydecanoate (a mitochondrial K ATP channel inhibitor, 100 
mol/L), glibenclamide (10 
mol/L), and glimepiride (10 
mol/L). The mitochondrial uncoupler carbonyl cyanide m-chlorophenylhydrazone (1 
mol/L) was used as a positive control. Cytosfluorometric analysis was done on a Coulter Epics flow cytometer equipped with a 488-nm argon laser. The TMRM signal was analyzed in the FL2 channel equipped with a band-pass filter at 580±30 nm; the photomultiplier value of the detector was 631 V. Data were acquired on a logarithmic scale. Arithmetic mean values of the median fluorescence intensities were determined for each sample for graphic representation. Experiments were performed on mitochondria isolated from 6 individual rats, each experiment representing 15 000 mitochondria.

Statistical Analysis
All values are expressed as mean±SEM. Data were analyzed by 1-way ANOVA and Fisher’s protected least significant difference
Results

Exclusions
We used a total of 76 rat hearts for the Langendorff perfusion study. Of these, 6 were excluded owing to poor function during stabilization.

Hemodynamic Data
Baseline data relating to cardiac function and coronary flow rates before regional ischemia where similar in all experimental groups. During regional ischemia, coronary flow and left ventricular developed pressure decreased to a similar extent in all groups. An increase in coronary flow during the first minutes of reperfusion was indicative of successful reflow, but coronary flow subsequently declined in all groups during the following 120-minute reperfusion period. During reperfusion, left ventricular developed pressure recovered gradually, though never reaching stabilization values.

Infarct Size Data
The risk zone volume was similar in all experimental groups, at ~0.5 cm³. Infarct size is represented as the percentage of tetrazolium-negative tissue in the ischemic risk zone. As expected, IP significantly reduced the amount of infarcted tissue in the risk zone compared with control hearts (18.6±1.5% vs 43.7±3.0%, P<0.01; Figures 2 and 3). Glimepiride or glibenclamide alone did not influence infarct size (glibenclamide 44.7±5%, glimepiride 41.4±4.7%). However, when administered before and during the IP protocol, glibenclamide abolished the protective effect of preconditioning (36.3±4% in glibenclamide+IP vs 18.6±1.5% in IP, P<0.05), whereas glimepiride did not (18.5±2.7% in glimepiride+IP vs 18.6±1.5% in IP; Figure 2).

With regard to potential effects on the mitochondria, we used the KATP channel opener diazoxide to investigate the differences between glibenclamide and glimepiride. Diazoxide alone given before ischemia also conferred protection against ischemia/reperfusion injury (infarct/risk zone, 22.2±4.7%; P<0.05 vs control). This beneficial effect was lost in the presence of glibenclamide (22.2±4.7% in diazoxide vs 38.8±5% in diazoxide+glibenclamide; P<0.05) but not in the presence of glimepiride (22.4±2.9% in diazoxide+glimepiride vs 22.2±4.7% in diazoxide; P>0.05; Figure 3).

Patch-Clamp Studies
To test whether glimepiride and diazoxide affect currents through sarcolemmal KATP channels of rat ventricular myocytes, we used patch-clamp techniques to record whole-cell membrane currents at a holding potential of 0 mV in 6 mmol/L K+ solution. Under these conditions, the KATP channel opener pinacolid activated a substantial outward KATP current, which was blocked by both 1 μmol/L glimepiride (Figure 4A) and 1 μmol/L glibenclamide (Figure 4B). The effectiveness of glimepiride in blocking sarcolemmal KATP channels was confirmed in 16 additional cells. In experiments in which we tested different concentrations, half blockage occurred with ~10 mmol/L glimepiride. In similar experiments, we looked for current activation by diazoxide (at 30 and 300 μmol/L). Figure 4B shows that no activation of current was detectable in response to diazoxide at 300 μmol/L, but the subsequent application of pinacolid (200 μmol/L) to the same cell activated substantial KATP current. The results from several cells (Figure 4C) show that diazoxide caused no activation of sarcolemmal KATP current at either 30 or 300 μmol/L. These results suggest that glibenclamide and glimepiride are potent blockers of sarcolemmal KATP channels in rat ventricular myocytes and that diazoxide does not activate these channels under our experimental conditions.

Mitochondrial Membrane Potential
Ascorbate was used in all experiments as a mitochondrial respiratory substrate. Application of ascorbate to the mitochondria caused an instantaneous increase in intensity of TMRM fluorescence, concomitant with mitochondrial membrane polarization. The mitochondrial uncoupler carbonyl cyanide m-chlorophenylhydrazone (1 μmol/L), used as a positive control to collapse membrane potential in the mitochondria, resulted in a large reduction in intensity of TMRM fluorescence (Figure 5A). Treatment of mitochondria with the physiological mitochondrial KATP channel opener GTP (50 μmol/L) significantly (P<0.0001) decreased the TMRM fluorescence from 153±3.9 arbitrary fluorescence units in untreated mitochondria to 135±2.9 (Figure 5A). GTP significantly decreased the mitochondrial membrane potential by 14±0.9% of the control value (Figure 5B). 5-Hydroxydecenoate, glimepiride, or glibenclamide alone had no effect on membrane potential (Figure 5B). Both glibenclamide and 5-hydroxydecenoate prevented the changes in membrane potential induced by GTP (150±4.7 and 150±3.8
arbitrary units, respectively, compared with control (153 ± 6), whereas glimepiride did not block these changes (132 ± 6 arbitrary units; Figures 5A and 5B).

Discussion
Diabetes is a common and widespread disease. In the diabetic population, 90% of patients have type 2 diabetes. In these patients there is an increased risk of cardiovascular complications followed by higher morbidity and mortality than in a nondiabetic population with coronary artery disease. The most common treatment approach in type 2 diabetes is administration of oral sulfonylureas, such as glibenclamide, which block KATP channels, thereby stimulating insulin release by pancreatic β-cells. Unfortunately, KATP channel blockade is not specific to the pancreas and can affect other tissues as well. It is well established that glibenclamide can also block sarcolemmal KATP channels in a number of other cell types, including vascular smooth muscle cells, cardiac myocytes, and vascular endothelium, as well as the KATP channels situated on the inner membrane of mitochondria.

Figure 4. Effects of sulfonylureas and diazoxide on sarcolemmal KATP current. A, Membrane current recorded from isolated rat ventricular myocyte by using whole-cell patch-clamp technique. Cell was held at 0 mV throughout, and extracellular solution contained 6 mmol/L K⁺. Application of KATP channel opener pinacidil activated outward KATP current, which was completely blocked by 1 μmol/L glimepiride. B, Recording from different cell under same conditions as in A. Diazoxide (300 μmol/L) did not activate KATP current, but subsequent application of pinacidil (200 μmol/L) activated substantial current that was inhibited by 1 μmol/L glibenclamide. C, Mean ± SEM sarcolemmal KATP (glibenclamide-sensitive) current at 0 mV in absence of KATP channel openers (6K), in presence of diazoxide (30 and 300 μmol/L) or pinacidil (200 μmol/L). n = 5 cells in each case. *P < 0.001 vs 6K, t test.

Figure 5. Effects of sulfonylureas and GTP on mitochondrial membrane potential. A, Representative flow cytometric profile of isolated cardiac mitochondria stained with TMRM showing mitochondrial membrane potential–associated fluorescence. Effect on control of (a) 50 μmol/L GTP, (b) GTP in presence of 10 μmol/L glimepiride, (c) GTP in presence of 100 μmol/L 5-hydroxydecanoate, (d) GTP in presence of 10 μmol/L glibenclamide, and (e) 1 μmol/L carbonyl cyanide m-chlorophenylhydrazone CCCP. B, Mean ± SEM percent change from control of median TMRM fluorescence, n = 6. ***P < 0.0001.
There is also substantial evidence to suggest that in diabetic patients with acute myocardial infarction, these oral agents should be avoided. Initial concern for issue this was raised in the early 1970s when the University Group Diabetes Program assessed the efficacy of oral hypoglycemic treatment compared with insulin and diet alone in the prevention of cardiovascular complications. They demonstrated a significantly higher cardiovascular mortality in patients on sulfonylureas compared with diet alone. Nonetheless, these agents have continued to be extensively used because, one suspects, of the lack of a plausible mechanism for the University Group Diabetes Program study results. The United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study, a large-scale clinical study of >5000 patients, attempted to answer the question of whether improved glycemic control reduced the risk of cardiovascular death in patients who were taking insulin and sulfonylureas. In that study no detrimental effect of sulfonylureas was noted, and the United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study is often cited as proof that sulfonylureas such as glibenclamide do not pose a risk to patients with type 2 diabetes. Unfortunately, what the study failed to ascertain was the effect that these agents had on these type 2 diabetic patients in the setting of acute coronary syndromes, ie, in patients directly at risk of myocardial infarction (presenting with chest pain or unstable angina).

In this context, one of the most potent mechanisms of protection against myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury is ischemic preconditioning. Endogenous protective response has been demonstrated in all species, including humans, and has been described as the beneficial adaptive response of the myocardium to repeated episodes of sublethal ischemia. A substantial body of evidence implicates mitochondrial KATP channel opening as playing a central role in ischemia. A substantial body of evidence implicates mitochondrial KATP channel opening as playing a central role in ischemia. 

Glucose transporters, such as Glut-1 and Glut-4, have been shown to have higher glucose-decreasing activity. This characteristic may be a consequence of its having a direct effect on the expression of glucose transporters, such as Glut-1 and Glut-4.

Our aim was to study the direct effect of these sulfonylurea drugs on the protection conferred by ischemic preconditioning by using infarct size, which has been shown to be a valid end point in relation to experimental preconditioning studies. The results show that infarct size reduction due to ischemic preconditioning was not significantly changed when the preconditioning protocol took place in the presence of glimepiride. On the contrary, glibenclamide completely abolished this protection. A possible explanation would be that unlike glibenclamide, glimepiride does not block the mitochondrial KATP channels, known to play a crucial role in preconditioning protection. To examine this hypothesis, the second aim of our study was to ascertain whether glimepiride abolished the protective role of diazoxide, a known opener of mitochondrial KATP channels at specific doses. It has been shown that diazoxide, when administered before ischemia, protects the infarcting myocardium; this beneficial effect being lost in the presence of glibenclamide. Our results confirm these studies with respect to glibenclamide but also demonstrate that glimepiride does not appear to abolish this protective effect; ie, the protection conferred by diazoxide is not lost even when the mitochondrial KATP opener is given in the presence of this sulfonylurea. The most plausible explanation would be that glimepiride does not affect mitochondrial KATP opening, whereas glibenclamide blocks this channel. We do note, however, that 10 μmol/L glibenclamide may not be specific, and we cannot exclude the possibility that at this concentration, glibenclamide abolishes other mechanisms involved in preconditioning.

Diazoxide has been shown to cause a decrease in mitochondrial membrane potential, although the exact process by which it does so remains controversial. Although diazoxide has been proposed to directly open mitochondrial KATP channels, it may in addition have a nonspecific effect on electron transport of the respiratory chain. To concentrate on the mitochondrial KATP channel specifically, the physiological mitochondrial KATP channel opener GTP was therefore used to investigate the action of the two sulfonylureas. GTP produced a decrease in mitochondrial membrane potential, which was blocked by glibenclamide, as well as by a suitable agent known to block mitochondrial KATP channels, viz, 5-hydroxydecanoate. Under the same conditions, glimepiride failed to inhibit the effects of GTP on mitochondrial membrane potential. These data indicate that glimepiride has no effect on mitochondrial KATP channel opening by GTP.

We believe that more studies, basic as well as clinical, are needed to fully elucidate and characterize the role of this sulfonylurea. At present, we believe that our study undertaken in the isolated rat heart demonstrates that glimepiride appears to be significantly less harmful to the ischemic heart than is the more conventionally used sulfonylurea glibenclamide. Further work in other species and in vivo are warranted. However, the present data may have important implications for the treatment of type 2 diabetes patients at risk of myocardial infarction, and appropriate clinical studies would need to be designed to ascertain the true nature of the role and place of such sulfonylureas in ischemic heart disease patients.
Acknowledgments
We thank the Elias Charitable Foundation, the British Heart Foundation, and Aventis for their support.

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_Circulation_. 2001;103:3111-3116
doi: 10.1161/01.CIR.103.25.3111

_Circulation_ is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 0009-7322. Online ISSN: 1524-4539

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
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