Published in final edited form as:
Nutr Rev. 2010 May ; 68(5): 270–279. doi:10.1111/j.1753-4887.2010.00282.x.

Leucine metabolism in regulation of insulin secretion from pancreatic beta cells

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Abstract

Leucine, a the branched-chain amino acids that must be supplied in daily diet, plays an important role in controlling protein synthesis and regulating cell metabolism in various cell types. In pancreatic β cells, leucine acutely stimulates insulin secretion by serving as both metabolic fuel and allosteric activator of glutamate dehydrogenase to enhance glutaminolysis. Leucine has also been shown to regulate gene transcription and protein synthesis in pancreatic islet β cells via both mTOR-dependent and -independent pathways at physiological concentrations. Long-term treatment of leucine has been shown to improve insulin secretory dysfunction of human diabetic islets via upregulation of certain key metabolic genes. In vivo, leucine administration improves glycemic control in humans and rodents with type 2 diabetes. This review aims to summarize and discuss the recent findings regarding the effects of leucine metabolism on pancreatic β cell function.

Keywords

leucine; glutamate dehydrogenase; mTOR; ATP synthase

Introduction

Branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs), including leucine, isoleucine and valine, are essential amino acids that cannot be manufactured in humans or other vertebrates and thus must be supplied in daily diet. BCAAs, in particular leucine, play a critical role in controlling protein synthesis by modulating translation initiation in various cells. Leucine is well known to acutely stimulate insulin secretion from pancreatic β cells by serving as both metabolic fuel and allosteric activator of glutamate dehydrogenase (GDH) 1-3. Recent reports indicate that leucine or its transaminated product α-ketoisocaproate (KIC) might impact on insulin secretion via a direct inhibition of β cell K_{ATP} currents 4. In the past decade, leucine had been demonstrated to activate the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), a serine and threonine protein kinase that regulates protein synthesis and cell metabolism, in pancreatic β cells 5. To date, leucine has been proven to stimulate gene transcription and protein synthesis in pancreatic islets or other cell types by both mTOR-dependent and -independent pathways 6-9. We have recently shown that long-term

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Declaration of interest. The authors have declared that no conflict of interest exists.

treatment with leucine augments glucose-stimulated insulin secretion in INS-1 cells, rat and human islets by upregulating certain metabolic genes via a rapamycin-insensitive mechanism 10, 11. In vivo, leucine administration acutely elevates circulating insulin in human, rodents, and mammals, and improves glycemic control in db/db mice or high-fat-diet-induced diabetic mice 12-14. A mixture of leucine, isoleucine, and valine acutely elevates circulating insulin levels and enhances glucose clearance after glucose load in healthy human subjects 13, 15. Increase in dietary leucine intake ameliorates diet-induced obesity, hyperglycemia, and hypercholesterolemia in human subjects and rodents via multiple mechanisms 12, 16-18. Leucine administration also increases protein synthesis in muscle, adipose and liver via multiple mechanisms 8, 19. Overall, leucine plays an important role in glucose homeostasis by exerting acute and chronic effects on pancreatic β cells, liver, muscle and adipose. In this review, recent findings regarding the effects of leucine on pancreatic β function will be briefly summarized and discussed. In particular, the therapeutic potential of some metabolic genes regulated by leucine signaling pathways in treatment of islet dysfunction and type 2 diabetes will also be discussed.

Leucine acutely stimulates insulin secretion from pancreatic β cells

Leucine or its metabolic intermediates regulates K_{ATP} channel activity—

Leucine stimulates insulin secretion from pancreatic β cells via two main mechanisms. One is in the direction of deamination to yield KIC 20, and the other is to enhance glutaminolysis by allosterically activating glutamate dehydrogenase (GDH), a key enzyme controlling the oxidation of glutamate 21. In the first case, it is believed that leucine or KIC regulates K_{ATP} channel activity 4 and results in increase of free cytosolic Ca^{2+}, which then triggers insulin secretory granules exocytosis via mechanisms involving activation of some protein kinases and protein acylation 22, 23. Leucine has been shown to be a more potent insulin secretagogue than its non-metabolic analog, 2-aminobicyclo(2,2,1)heptane-2-carboxylic acid (BCH) 24. Interruption of pyruvate cycling inhibits insulin secretion stimulated by leucine in the presence of glutamine in rat islets and INS-1 cells 25. Controversially, it has also been reported that KIC may more potently stimulate insulin secretion from islet β cells than leucine at the equal molar concentration 26, 27. Recently, we found that leucine and KIC show distinct effects on stimulation of insulin secretion from pancreatic islet cells. We observed that glucose completely blocks the effects of leucine, but not those of KIC on stimulation of insulin secretion from islet β cells 20. Branstrom and colleagues demonstrate that KIC closes ATP-sensitive K^+ channel and induces the depolarization of plasma membrane of db/db mouse islet cells via a direct action, whereas leucine fails to do so4. In addition, there is a subset of leucine-sensitive hyperinsulinemic-hypoglycemic children who have mutations in the sulfonylurea receptor 1 (SUR1) subunit of K_{ATP} channel but have no mutations in GDH 28, 29. Moreover, a recent study indicates that glutaminolysis stimulated by BCH is enhanced in SUR1 knockout and glyburide-treated wild type islets 30.

Controversially, Ball and colleagues report that long-term treatment with 100 μM glyburide, a potent inhibitor of SUR1, significantly inhibits leucine-stimulated, but not glucose-stimulated insulin secretion in BRIN-BD11 cell line 31. Rabaglia and colleagues demonstrate that methyl-leucine or aminooxyacetate, inhibitors of branched-chain amino transferase, blocks KIC-stimulated insulin secretion in diabetes-susceptible BTBR mouse islets 32, suggesting that conversion to leucine plays an important role in KIC-stimulated insulin secretion 20. However, it should be noted that further oxidation of KIC to yield ATP may also play important roles in leucine- or KIC-stimulated insulin secretion 20. We have previously demonstrated that glucose and KIC cause a significant increase in unesterified arachidonic acid accumulation in pancreatic islet cells, whereas mannose, fructose and glyceraldehyde have no significant effects on cellular unesterified arachidonic acid accumulation concomitant with their failure to stimulate insulin secretion 33. Consistent

with these observations, diabetic Goto-Kakizaki (GK) rat islets have a deficient insulin response to leucine, which has been proposed to be due to decreased generation of acetyl-CoA from KIC oxidation 34. Recently, MacDonald and colleagues reported that KIC alone fails to stimulate insulin secretion in cultured rat islets and INS-1 832/13 cells 35, 36.

Allosteric activation of GDH by leucine—There are two GDH isoenzymes in human tissues. One is encoded by GLUD1 gene with ubiquitous expression (housekeeping gene), and the other is encoded by GLUD2 gene with specific expression in neural tissues 37. GDH isotype in pancreatic β cells is encoded by GLUD1 gene. GDH is the key enzyme controlling amino acids and ammonia metabolism in pancreatic β cells, liver, and brain 38. Mature human GLUD1-derived GDH without the leader peptide (55 amino acids) contains 505 amino acid residues 39, which form one catalytic domain at the N-terminus and one allosteric domain at the C-terminus 39. Leucine and ADP potently activate GDH, whereas valine, isoleucine and methionine activate GDH weakly. GDH is normally allosterically inhibited by GTP and ATP. It had been reported decades ago that a non-metabolic analog of leucine, BCH, significantly stimulates insulin secretion from pancreatic β cells 2, 40. Selective activation of GDH is the main or the only mechanism by which BCH stimulates insulin secretion from β cells because it cannot be metabolized 2, 40. Selective inhibition of GDH activity by polyphenols extracted from green tea or 5'-deoxypyridoxal inhibits BCH- or leucine-stimulated, but not glucose-stimulated insulin secretion from pancreatic islet cells 41, 42. Interruption of pyruvate cycling inhibits BCH-stimulated insulin secretion in the presence of glutamine in rat islets and INS-1 cells 25. Aluminum has also been shown to inhibit human GDH activity by inducing conformational change of the protein 43. BCH and other non-metabolic analogs of leucine are very useful to study the acute effects of leucine on stimulation of insulin secretion involving selective activation of GDH in pancreatic β cells. We have previously demonstrated that leucine-mediated glutaminolysis via GDH activation may play a critical role in interprandial insulin release when blood glucose falls below 5 mM. This basal insulin release accounts for about half of the daily required insulin secretion from β cells 44. Overexpression of GDH significantly enhances insulin secretion by glutamine stimulation alone (2.7 folds) or glutamine plus BCH (about 6 folds) in pancreatic beta cells. Interestingly, although insulin secretion at low glucose is not affected by GDH overexpression, high glucose-stimulated insulin secretion is significantly potentiated by GDH overexpression in rat islets 45. Consistently, deletion of GDH partially abolishes glucose-stimulated insulin secretion in pancreatic β cells 46. These observations suggest that GDH may also function as a rate-limiting enzyme in the process of glucose-induced insulin secretion in pancreatic β cells beyond its well-established role as a glutamate sensor 45.

Hyperinsulinemia is the most common cause of persistent hypoglycemia in infants and children. Recent discoveries show that the disorders of K_{ATP} channel, gain-of-function mutations in glucokinase (GK) and GDH are associated with hyperinsulinemic hypoglycemia of infancy (HHI) 47–49. In 1998, Stanley and colleagues first demonstrated that hyperinsulinism–hyperammonemia syndrome is caused by mutations in the glutamate dehydrogenase gene 39. The authors identified five mutations in glutamate dehydrogenase, which are His454Tyr, Ser445Leu, Gly446Ser, Gly446Asp and Ser448Pro, respectively, from eight patients with hyperinsulinism-hyperammonemia syndrome. Sequence comparison reveals that all these mutations are located in a narrow region near the GTP-binding domain of GDH 39. These mutant GDH proteins show a similar basal enzyme activity and sensitivity to ADP activation, whereas they are insensitive to GTP inhibition as compared with wild type GDH protein. Clearly, the activity of these mutant GDHs may increase in response to amino acid stimulation. Actually, hypoglycemia of hyperinsulinism-hyperammonemia syndrome patients will be precipitated after a protein meal or amino acids load 39, 50, 51. Transgenic (TG) mice specifically expressing human His454Tyr GDH in

pancreatic islet driven by the rat insulin promoter show hypoglycemia as compared with control mice expressing wild type human GDH in islets. In vitro, His454Tyr TG mouse islets secrete more insulin in response to leucine or amino acid mixture in the presence of 2 mM glutamine than control mouse islets due to increased glutamine oxidation 52. In contrast, glucose-stimulated insulin secretion is inhibited in His454Tyr TG mouse islets when compared with control islets 52. Moreover, although mutation of Arg 443 in regulatory domain of human GDH to Ser significantly impairs its basal enzyme activity, leucine at the concentrations of 0.3 ~ 6.0 mM activates the mutant enzyme activity up to 20 fold in the presence of 0.025 ~ 0.1 mM ADP 53. Recently, Kapoor and colleagues identified another 3 mutations in GDH, which are N410D, D451V and P436L, respectively 54. Interestingly, although P436L GDH is associated with loss of GTP inhibition like other mutants 39, 50, 51, the patients with heterozygous P436L GDH have hyperinsulinism and normal serum ammonia concentration54. All these research indicate that GDH plays a crucial role in regulating insulin secretion from pancreatic β cells in response to glutamine, leucine, glucose or other fuels. Activating mutations of GDH are predominantly associated with hyperinsulinism–hyperammonemia syndrome. Discoveries and development of selective inhibitors of GDH have shed new light on the treatment of hyperinsulinism-hypoglycemia syndrome involving gain-of-function mutations in GDH gene 41, 55. In islet β cells of db/db mice, KIC fails to elevate cellular NADH and Ca^{2+}, whereas glucose potently increases both of them 56. On the contrary, KIC induces hypersecretion of insulin in islets of insulin resistant BTBR mice 32. These observations suggest that dysregulation of leucine-metabolic-linked insulin secretion may be involved in the progression of islet β cell dysfunction and type 2 diabetes. In isolated perfused chicken pancreas, 20 and 40 mM L-leucine or 10-40 mM KIC alone fails to stimulate insulin secretion, while they evokes a slight biphasic insulin release in the presence of 14 mM glucose, suggesting that leucine may stimulate insulin secretion differently in chicken and mammals 57.

In summary, leucine is likely to exert its acute effects on stimulation of insulin secretion from pancreatic islets through combined mechanisms involving regulation of both ATP production and K_{ATP} activity. In the former case, leucine-mediated increase in ATP production is achieved through its metabolic oxidation and allosteric activation of GDH that enhances glutaminolysis

Leucine regulates gene transcription and protein synthesis in pancreatic β cells

mTOR-dependent signaling—Mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) is a serine and threonine kinase that regulates protein translation via activation of the 70-kDa ribosomal protein S6 kinase ($p70^{S6K}$) and the eukaryotic translation initiation factor 4E-binding protein-1 (4EBP1) 9, 58. The effect of mTOR on enhancement of protein synthesis can be blocked by rapamycin, a widely used immunosuppressant. Recently, a number of studies have revealed that branched-chain amino acids play an important role in regulation of protein synthesis by activating mTOR in pancreatic β cells 5, 7, 9, 58. Leucine and KIC significantly stimulate the phosphorylation of $p70^{S6K}$ and enhance protein synthesis in pancreatic β cells in a rapamycin-sensitive and insulin-independent manner at physiological concentrations ranging from 0.4 mM to 4 mM 9, 58, 59. Similarly, isoleucine and valine also activate $p70^{S6K}$ in these studies 9, 58, 59. In contrast, BCH fails to activate mTOR and $p70^{S6K}$ at the concentrations ranging from 0.2 mM to 10 mM 58. These results indicate that leucine activates mTOR signaling pathway by a metabolic-linked mechanism, in which GDH activation is unlikely involved. Protein-energy malnutrition has been reported to inhibit pancreatic β cell replication in the fetal rodent pancreas by an unknown mechanism 60, 61. Since leucine diversely and nonspecifically stimulates protein synthesis in pancreatic β cells via mTOR-dependent mechanism, certain important transcriptional regulator(s) might be degraded under low-leucine condition, resulting in consequential inhibition of gene

transcription and β cell replication observed in these studies 60, 61. A recent study reveals that the inhibition of AMPK activity by glucose and amino acids may be involved in nutrient-stimulated mTOR activation but not in insulin secretion in pancreatic β cells 62. Consistently, activation of AMPK by 5-aminoimidazole-4-carboxamide-1-beta-D-ribonucleoside (AICAR) inhibits leucine-induced increases in mTOR activity and protein synthesis in rat skeletal muscle under *in vivo* conditions 63. Importantly, leucine has also been shown to enhance protein synthesis by mTOR-mediated activation of $p70^{S6K}$ and 4EBP1 in other tissues such as liver, muscle, adipose, and myoblast 6, 64-71.

mTOR-independent signaling—We have recently demonstrated that long-term culture with leucine upregulates certain metabolic genes via an unknown mechanism 10, 11. Rapamycin at the concentration of 10 nM fails to block the induction of these metabolic genes by leucine at 10 mM. Rapamycin has been used at the concentration of 10 nM in these studies 10, 11 because long-term treatment with rapamycin greater than 10 nM significantly induces apoptosis of pancreatic β cells 72. Although the rapamycin concentration tested in our studies is lower than that in other studies 9, 58, in which the acute effects of leucine on mTOR activation have been evaluated, we still cannot rule out the possibility that leucine regulates gene expression or protein synthesis via a rapamycin-insensitive signaling pathway in pancreatic islet cells. In support, Talvas and colleagues report that there is a lack of regulation of mTOR activity in response to leucine deprivation in C2C12 myotubes, suggesting that the activation of $p70^{S6K}$ may be achieved through an mTOR-independent mechanism. The authors further show that the availability of eIF4E with eIF2α phosphorylation is not determinant for decreasing global protein synthesis in leucine deprivation condition 73. As extensively reviewed and discussed in reference 8 8, rapamycin attenuates but does not prevent the leucine-induced enhancement of protein synthesis or eIF4F complex formation. It has been proposed that leucine regulates muscle protein synthesis through both an insulin- and mTOR-dependent signaling pathway involving 4EBP1 and $p70^{S6K}$ phosphorylation, and an insulin- and mTOR-independent pathway involving enhanced eIF4F complex formation 8. In addition, Blomstrand and colleagues also report that branched-chain amino acids, in particular leucine, can stimulate phosphorylation of $p70^{S6K}$ and enhance protein synthesis in muscle by a mechanism involving both mTOR-dependent and -independent pathways 6. Lee and colleagues report that leucine increases ^{3}H-thymidine incorporation and cell proliferation in chicken hepatocytes through a mechanism involving both PKC/ERK1/2 signaling pathway and mTOR-dependent signaling pathway 74. Rapamycin fails to block swelling-independent proteolysis inhibition by leucine in perfused rat livers, suggesting that at least rapamycin-sensitive mTOR activation is not involved in this process 75. Islets isolated from mice fed on a low protein (LP) diet for 8 weeks have lower expression levels of insulin receptor substrate-1 (IRS-1) and $p70^{S6K}$ than those from mice fed on normal protein (NP) diet. Glucose- and leucine-stimulated insulin secretion are significantly impaired in islets of LP-diet-fed mice when compared with control islets 76. Overall, it is likely that leucine also regulate gene transcription and protein synthesis in pancreatic β cells by mTOR-independent signaling pathway(s).

Leucine regulation reveals that ATP synthase functions as a rate-limiting enzyme in the process of insulin secretion

Given the well-established facts that leucine nonspecifically enhances protein synthesis via mTOR-dependent and/or -independent mechanisms, it is reasonable to speculate that the protein expression of some transcription regulators or important metabolic enzymes might be upregulated by long-term treatment of leucine in pancreatic β cells. Thus, leucine may exert a long-term impact on insulin secretion and cell function of pancreatic β cells by regulating gene expression. To test this hypothesis, a genome-wide screening of 40,000 genes in RINm5F cells treated with leucine using microarray analysis has been performed

by our laboratory. The microarray analysis results show that treatment with 10 mM leucine for 24 hours up-regulates ATP synthase β subunit (ATPβ) mRNA level by 3.2 fold. In contrast, the expression of other subunits of mitochondrial ATP synthase complex is not affected by leucine treatment10, 11. The effect of long-term treatment with leucine on upregulation of ATPβ mRNA and protein levels is further confirmed in rat islets, INS-1 cells and human islets. Leucine regulation, siRNA knockdown and plasmid overexpression experiments indicate that ATP synthase (ATPβ) may function as a rate-limiting enzyme in the process of insulin secretion upon GK activation 10, 11, which is consistent with the previous observations that overexpression of GK alone fails to augment insulin secretion in INS-1 cells 77, 78. However, it should be noted that the enhancement of insulin secretion in rat and human islets by long-term leucine treatment in our studies is likely due to the change of a bunch of metabolic genes including ATPβ 11. Consistently, mitochondria has been reported to set the limit of fuel-induced insulin secretion in pancreatic islets 79. Our findings contradict a previous report that 24-h culture with 20 mM leucine impairs glucose-induced insulin secretion and increases ADP level in rat islets. However, the lack of changes in the ATP level and glucose utilization and oxidation in this study is difficult to explain 80. Moreover, Zhang and colleagues report that chronic exposure to leucine downregulates the expression of PDX-1, GK, and GLUT2 in rat insulinoma beta-cells, resulting in decreased insulin content and glucose-induced insulin secretion at high glucose 81. Martens and colleagues demonstrate that treatment with 10 mM leucine for 72 hours significantly reduces apoptosis of rat islet β cells concomitant with decreased reactive oxygen species (ROS) levels 82. Given that all of the catalytic sites of F1 ATP synthase are located either exclusively on the β subunits or at interfaces between β and α subunits (ATPα) 83, 84, reduced expression of ATPβ or ATPα will definitely impair ATP synthesis in mitochondria. It has been reported that reduced cellular ATP content are associated with decreased expression of ATPβ or ATPα in various tissues of diabetic human and rodents 85, 86. Recently, ATPβ is shown to be expressed in the plasma membrane of various cell types and a putative receptor for enterostatin, a pentapeptide secreted by stomach and pancreas 87, 88. Incubation with enterostatin for 60 minutes significantly stimulates the translocation of ATPβ to the plasma membrane of INS-1 cells by 3.5 fold 89, which may have reduced mitochondrial ATPβ content and thus impaired ATP synthesis. This observation may partially explain the previous observations that enterostatin inhibits fuel-stimulated insulin secretion from pancreatic β cells 90¯92. Chronic exposure to free fatty acids (FFAs) also stimulates the translocation of ATPβ to the plasma membrane of INS-1 cells 89, which may also contribute to the deleterious effects of FFAs on pancreatic β cells 93.

Pancreatic β cell dysfunction is a decisive cause of type 2 diabetes. Obesity-related hyperglycemia, hyperlipidemia and excessive circulating inflammatory cytokines are the most important physiological factors causing β cell dysfunction. In the past decade, increasing evidence had suggested that inhibition of ATP synthesis in mitochondria is the central event during the progression of β cell dysfunction (Figure 1). Long-term lipid or glycemic stress activates uncoupling protein 2 (UCP2) expression in islet β cells, which initially prevents cells from being damaged by lipotoxic or glucotoxic insult by decreasing the proton potential ($\Delta\psi$) between intermembrane space and inner membrane of the mitochondria 94, 95. However, mitochondrial ATP synthesis and insulin secretion from pancreatic islet β cells will be inhibited by an increase in UCP2 expression 96, 97. Genipin, a UCP2 inhibitor, acutely reverses obesity- and high glucose-induced β cell dysfunction in isolated pancreatic islets 97. Köhnke and colleagues report that a combination of fatty acids and glucose at high concentration downregulates ATPβ expression in INS-1 cells and reduces cellular ATP content. The authors further propose that the decrease in ATP synthesis rate in mitochondria resulting from downregulation of ATPβ plays a crucial role in fatty acid- and glucose-induced β cell dysfunction 98. Other alternative mechanisms through which fatty acids induce pancreatic β cell dysfunction and apoptosis include activation of

PERK and microRNAs, oxidative stress, and excessive accumulation of cellular ceramide 99, 100. Chronic exposure to excessive proinflammatory cytokines including IL-1β, TNF-α and INF-γ activates inducible nitrogen synthase (iNOS) in pancreatic islet β cells, which produces excessive NO. NO binds to Complex IV of mitochondrial respiratory chain and inhibits the formation of proton gradient in pancreatic β cell mitochondria. Thus, inhibition of ATP synthesis is likely to be involved in cytokine-induced pancreatic β cell dysfunction and apoptosis 101, 102. Chronic exposure of islet β cells to high glucose will both upregulate GK gene expression and allosterically activate GK activity, resulting in sequential increases in glucose oxidation, electron transport rate in electron transport chain (ETC) and mitochondrial $\Delta\psi$ 103, 104. It has been reported that high mitochondrial $\Delta\psi$ is the primary cause of excessive production of ROS in pancreatic β cells under hyperglycemic and hyperlipidemic conditions 105, 106. Consistently, although glucose oxidation is increased, cellular ATP content under glucose stimulation is significantly reduced in β cell lines overexpressing GK. Moreover, GK overexpressing cells produce more ROS concomitant with increased apoptotic cells under the stimulation of high glucose 107. In contrast, PPAR-γ agonists have been shown to protect β cells from fatty acid-induced oxidative stress and cell apoptosis by increasing cellular ATP content and decreasing ROS levels 108. Similarly, transgenic mice specifically overexpressing GK in liver show impaired glucose tolerance over 6 months old 109. These results indicate that long-term activation of GK alone enhances glucose oxidation and elevates mitochondrial $\Delta\psi$, which results in excessive ROS production. To increase the mitochondrial proton leak rate, either by ATP synthesis 10, 11, 82 or UCP2-mediated heat production 106, 110, will be important for maintaining normal mitochondrial $\Delta\psi$ and preventing excessive ROS production in pancreatic islet β cells under hyperglycemic and hyperlipidemic conditions (Figure 1). Clearly, leucine may also attenuate glucotoxicity by inhibition of ROS production via increase in ATP synthesis10, 11 or other unknown mechanisms82.

To date, the mechanism by which leucine upregulates GK and ATPβ still remains unknown. However, recent studies have suggested that leucine signaling pathway may have crosstalk with some transcriptors or nuclear receptors including PDX-1111, LXR 112 and PPARγ113¯115 in upregulation of GK and ATPβ.

Overall, the decrease in mitochondrial ATP synthesis rate is associated with the progression of pancreatic islet dysfunction and type 2 diabetes. To elevate cellular ATP synthesis rate by leucine-mediated upregulation of ATPβ or other metabolic enzymes may represent a potential intervention strategy for treatment of islet dysfunction and type 2 diabetes.

Conclusion and perspective

Leucine plays important roles in regulation of insulin secretion and cell metabolism of pancreatic β cells via acute and chronic effects (Figure 2). Allosteric regulation of GDH activity by leucine and/or other molecules has been demonstrated to be a potential intervention strategy for some insulin secretion disorders. In addition, further studies on the distinct mechanism(s) by which leucine regulates the expression of key metabolic genes in pancreatic β cells will shed new light on prevention and treatment of islet dysfunction and type 2 diabetes.

Acknowledgments

Funding. This work was supported by grants from the Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC 30870995 and 30771030 to J.Y), Program from the Ministry of Education of China “New Century Excellent Talents in Universities” (to J.Y), and National Institute of Diabetes, Digestive, and Kidney Diseases (DK070744 to B.R.B). We also thank Pro. Yuansheng Gao, Drs. Jihong Kang and Robert A, Young for critical comments during manuscript preparation.

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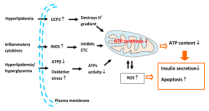

Figure 1. Association of reduced ATP synthesis in mitochondria with obesity-induced pancreatic β cell dysfunction

Decrease in ATP synthesis is the central event in the progression of islet dysfunction under insulin-resistant conditions. UCP2: uncoupling protein 2; iNOS: inducible nitrogen synthase; ATPβ: ATP synthase β subunit; ATPs: ATP synthase complex; ROS: reactive oxygen species; ETC: electron transport chain.

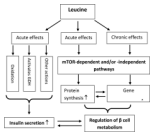

Figure 2. Leucine plays diverse roles in regulation of insulin secretion in pancreatic β cell via acute and chronic effects

Further demonstration of the mechanisms by which leucine regulates GDH activity and upregulates other key metabolic genes will shed new light on prevention and treatment of type 2 diabetes. GDH: glutamate dehydrogenase; mTOR: mammalian target of rapamycin.