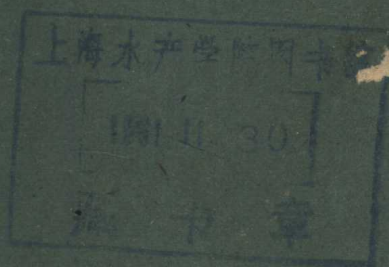




PROTEIN AND AMINO ACID NUTRITION

Edited by
Anthony A. Albanese



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Anthony A. Albanese

St. Luke's Convalescent Hospital

Greenwich, Connecticut

Burke Foundation, White Plains, New York

Osborn Home, Rye, New York



1959

ACADEMIC PRESS • New York and London

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ACADEMIC PRESS INC.

111 FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

United Kingdom Edition

Published by

ACADEMIC PRESS INC. (LONDON) LTD.

50 PAUL MALL, LONDON S. W. 1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 59-13824

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Preface

During the past few years, there have been many requests that the monograph "Protein and Amino Acid Requirements of Mammals"* be brought up to date and expanded in scope. Moreover, fellow investigators have indicated that there is need for a collection in one volume of rather detailed presentations describing the current state of knowledge concerning this aspect of nutrition. This volume aims to fill that need.

The unprecedented research activity in this field and in related areas during the past decade has resulted in a gradually increasing limitation of space in the periodical literature which can be allotted to review, reflections, and speculations on the broad significance of experimental findings. These publication restrictions tend to retard the continuity of scientific thought and progress. One solution to the problem appears to be the use of media which can provide qualified investigators ample space and freedom to express themselves fully in the area of their major cognizance.

Although all segments of human communication are currently beset by difficulties of orderly and accurate transmission of facts, the field of nutrition falls prey to some unique hazards. The most serious of these results from the vast number of reports dealing with nutritional matters which appear almost daily in the lay literature. No one will deny the value of public education in this most vital of subjects. Competition for space and readers, however, tends to lead to the dramatization of certain scientific reports at the expense of accuracy. Although such accounts of scientific observations in the public press can be condoned somewhat by the expediency of the circumstances, the increasing appearance of these articles in the professional literature is to be deplored and constitutes a disservice to the science of nutrition, particularly when the editorial responsibility is cloaked with authoritarian anonymity.

The Editor wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation and thanks the generous collaboration of the individual contributors which has made this volume possible. He feels particularly indebted to his colleague and mentor for more than a decade, Dr. Reginald A. Higgons, for his assistance in many of the editorial and reviewing tasks connected with this publication. Acknowledgment is also due Mrs. Muriel E. Rosenquest and Miss Louise A. Orto, for their valuable help and industry in proof-

* Edited by Anthony A. Albanese, Academic Press, Inc., 1950.

reading and indexing, and Miss Gloria T. Greco for her assistance in the library research portion of this effort. Last, but not least, the encouraging and gracious guidance of the Editorial and Production Staffs of the Academic Press is recognized with many thanks.

ANTHONY A. ALBANESE

Greenwich, Connecticut
June, 1959

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Perspectives

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Perusal of the contents of the present volume will reveal that the past decade has witnessed considerable progress in our understanding of the nutrition of proteins and amino acids. It will be noted in particular that the development and application of new procedures has not only greatly expanded the field of inquiry in experimental animals, but also has made possible the conduct of exact nutritional and biochemical measurements in human subjects of all ages and under a variety of physiological and pathological conditions. Under the continuing assault of micro- and radiochemistry, we have learned that the quantitative and qualitative nutrient needs of mammals are subject to significant species (Mitchell, 1959) and individual (Williams, 1959) differences; and that the need for a specific nutrient in any single species is defined by an almost infinite number of variables; and that the protein value of foods is susceptible to an equally large number of vicissitudes. This development of minutiae, however, does not relegate to the discard the general metabolic laws of nutrient needs and waste per unit of surface area developed so ably in the first quarter of this century (Brody, 1945). Rather, it points to the fact that maintenance of a necessary metabolic rate and function per unit of surface area varies for specific nutrients from individual to individual, and from species to species. This should come as no surprise if we consider that no two energy converters, organic or inorganic, will function with identical efficiency.

In living organisms these differences are ultimately traceable to variations in available enzymes or other biocatalysts (Martin, 1958). This aspect of human chemistry is not new. It received attention and documentation by Garrod as long ago as 1923, under the title "Inborn Errors of Metabolism." Today, because of the wonders of chromatography, we have micro tests for almost every conceivable organic constituent. Thus, we are able not only to ascertain the presence of classic metabolic aberrations (alkaptonuria, phenylketonuria) with greater frequency, but also to discover new and heretofore unsuspected biochemical lesions (Dent, 1947; Harris, 1955). Such lesions have been produced artificially by deprivation of a single amino acid (Albanese, 1952; Hall *et al.*, 1948). Administration of antimetabolites has been shown to result in similar

pathological lesions (Woolley, 1952) and congenital malformations (Warkany, 1958).

The past decade has also shown that as the periphery of specific areas of study is expanded, there occurs a rapid fusion and eventual disappearance of boundaries. Thus, we find that both the catabolic and anabolic phases of the metabolism of the amino acids are inextricably related to the metabolism of fats and carbohydrates (Swanson, 1959), and they cannot be studied or discussed without some reference to nutrition in general. This becomes quickly apparent from a consideration of the currently known metabolic interrelationships of the amino acids (Fig. 1). Continued study of the nutritional implications of these metabolic linkages may be expected in the proximate future to yield more exact knowledge on specific protein and amino acid needs. Accordingly, it seems worth while here to delineate briefly the current state of development of some of these relationships.

I. VITAMINS AND AMINO ACID METABOLISM

From the metabolic diagram (Fig. 1) it is at once apparent that the biochemistry of amino acids is integrated with the over-all metabolism and all of the vitamins that are dietary essentials are involved in normal metabolism. In general, the role of the vitamins is that of serving essential parts of the molecular structure of the enzyme systems that constitute the metabolic machinery of the cells. Many gross effects, such as lack of growth, are common to a number of vitamin deficiencies, as well as some amino acid deficiencies. It has been shown (Kinney and Follis, 1958) that some pathological lesions produced in experimental animals by amino acid deficiencies are indistinguishable from those caused by vitamin deficiencies. Goldsmith (1956) has skillfully clarified the interdependence of the intermediary metabolism of niacin and tryptophan and the effect of this biochemical circumstance on the nutritional needs of these two dietary essentials.

Specific evidences of even more subtle interrelationships are now on hand. Some six years ago, some babies receiving a proprietary milk formula began to show excessive irritability and, in many instances, convulsions (Bessey, 1957). On the basis of similar symptoms in experimental animals, and a consideration of the way in which the product was manufactured, a deficiency of vitamin B₆ was suspected. This suspicion was soon confirmed by the favorable response of the infants to formulas with an increased vitamin B₆ content.

Biochemical studies have revealed that animals deficient in vitamin B₆ excrete xanthurenic acid in the urine and this excretion is also increased after the administration of a test dose of tryptophan (Robinson, 1951).

In the absence of vitamin B₆, xanthurenic acid, now known to be an abnormal product of tryptophan metabolism, is formed in increasing quantities. In babies with convulsions, xanthurenic acid disappeared after B₆ therapy was instituted. In all cases except two, the level of

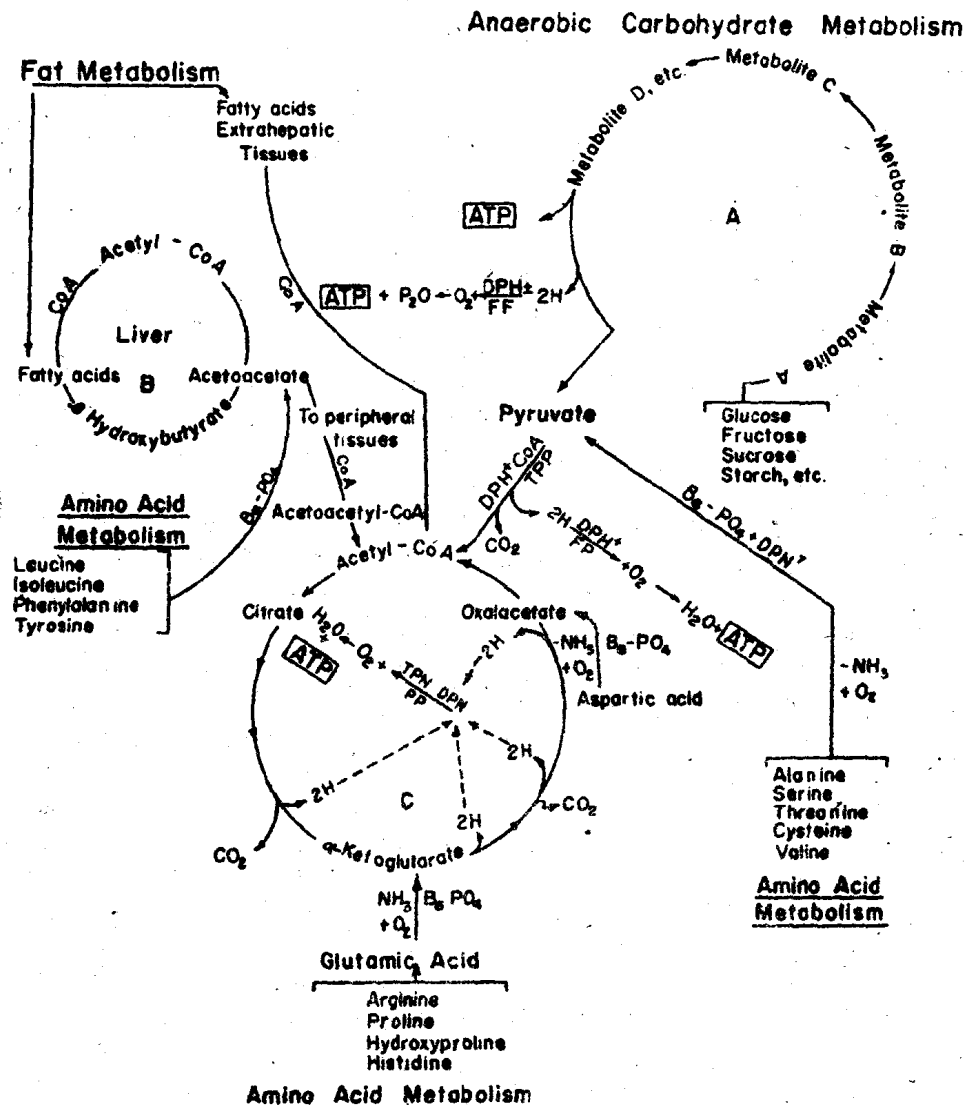


FIG. 1. Metabolic integration. ATP = Adenosine triphosphate; DPN^+ = di-phosphopyridine nucleotide (niacin in structure); TPN^+ = triphosphopyridine nucleotide (niacin in structure); TPP = thiamine pyrophosphate (thiamine in structure); FP = flavoprotein (riboflavin in structure); CoA = coenzyme A (pantothenic acid in structure); $\text{B}_6 \cdot \text{PQ}_4$ (vitamin B₆ in structure). From Bessey (1957).

vitamin B₆ required to eliminate xanthurenic acid excretion was considerably above that required to eliminate convulsions. Apparently the amount of vitamin B₆ required for normal metabolism of tryptophan is greater than the amount required for minimum function of some as yet unknown biochemical properties of nervous tissue. These facts now form the basis for a test of vitamin B₆ status in infants.

Evidences, although not as clear-cut as the foregoing, are on hand regarding the relationship of most known vitamins to protein and amino acid nutrition. The important role of vitamin B₁₂ in the biosynthesis of proteins is now generally acknowledged. A deficiency of vitamin B₁₂ reduces nucleic acid synthesis and this causes a decrease in cell division. This has been demonstrated in human bone marrow cells from pernicious anemia patients (Glazer *et al.*, 1954). Rats receiving B₁₂ will grow on diets deficient in choline and methionine, but containing homocystine. This suggests that the vitamin has a function in the metabolism of labile methyl groups (Bennett, 1950). In hyperthyroid rats, B₁₂ has a protein-sparing action. This does not prevent weight loss, however, for protein is spared at the expense of other body constituents (Rupp *et al.*, 1951). This vitamin also permits utilization of nitrogen in animals fed a diet high in soybean protein (Catron *et al.*, 1952; Hsu *et al.*, 1953). Since the methionine content of soybean protein is low, this effect is most likely related to the methionine-sparing activity of B₁₂, rather than to a direct effect on protein synthesis.

Less clear are the relationships of vitamins C, A, and E to protein and amino acid nutrition. The lesions which deficiencies of these vitamins induce in both experimental animals and man leave no doubt that they participate in the synthesis of many specialized tissues. For example, one of the most important roles of ascorbic acid involves the formation of collagen in teeth, bone, cartilage, connective tissue, and skin. It promotes normal development of the teeth, including both pulp and dentine (Fish and Harris, 1935), but apparently does not influence the occurrence of dental caries in man. Ascorbic acid has also been reported to be essential for regeneration of damaged nerve tissue (Hines *et al.*, 1944). Diets high in protein increase the excretion of ascorbic acid.

Although the function of vitamin A in the chemistry of the visual purple is now clearly understood, its function in maintaining the integrity of epithelial cells and as a stimulus for new cell growth, remains obscure. Vitamin E deficiency leads to progressive muscular dystrophy in experimental animals, but vitamin E has no beneficial effect, even in massive doses, on muscular dystrophy occurring in man. The investigative opportunities in this area seem endless.

II. EFFECT OF SOME THERAPEUTIC AGENTS ON PROTEIN AND AMINO ACID NUTRITION

Although the number and diversity of pharmacological agents having rather well-defined effects on metabolism continues to grow, very little effort has been made to date to correlate the metabolic or nutritional disturbances with either pharmacological activity or chemical structure of these agents. The ever-increasing interest in nutrition will, of course, result in a growing need to assay new therapeutic agents, not only for their pharmacological properties, but also for their nutritional characteristics.

A. ANTIBIOTICS

The subject of antibiotics in nutrition was admirably reviewed by Jukes (1955). It is clear and well established from available evidence that an apparent improvement in the nutritional status of animals and humans may often be produced by adding small quantities of certain antibiotics to the diet. The mechanism by which their effects on nutrition are produced appears to be secondary to their antibacterial action. Stokstad (1955) has discussed the effect of antibiotics on vitamin requirements. He notes that while a vitamin-sparing action can explain in part the growth response on diets marginal in vitamins, it does not account for the growth observed in nutritionally complete rations. The vitamin-sparing effect of the antibiotics has been observed to occur for both water-soluble and fat-soluble vitamins. A thorough consideration of the data leads Coates and Kon (1955) to believe that although the growth-promoting effect of antibiotics depends to a large extent on their antibacterial properties, their direct effect on certain metabolic processes cannot be overlooked. Hence, it is conceivable that given in the diet, they exert a small but definite pharmacological action which contributes to their beneficial effects on growth.

There are currently growing indications that the combined administration of antibiotics and amino acids may help resolve some nutritional problems in technologically underdeveloped areas of the world. Because of the impracticability of supplying to many children living in tropical countries diets rich in high quality proteins, it often happens that their growth is slow; and they become stunted. Since antibiotics and other substances, such as lysine, have growth-stimulation effects on children in temperate zones, Loughlin and associates (1957-1958) decided to try these agents in chronically malnourished tropical children. Sixty-four children (6-16 years) at a rural school in Haiti were selected for study. After their conditions had been analyzed they were fed under controlled study conditions; the children were separated into four matched groups.

In three, supplements to their diets were used in the form of 10 mg. and 50 mg. of oxytetracycline and 1 gm. of lysine, respectively. The fourth group received placebos. The study was run on a double blind basis, and lasted for 6 months. On analysis it was found that the group that received 50 mg. of oxytetracycline daily manifested the best growths. In growth factors, the group receiving lysine came out second. There were no toxic or untoward effects noted as the result of this long-range administration of oxytetracycline or lysine.

A critical evaluation of the role of nutrition in the prophylaxis and treatment of disease reveals many other areas in which proteins and antibiotics may jointly serve to improve over-all metabolism and reduce the incidence of infections (Halpern, 1955).

B. STEROIDS

The rapidly increasing availability and usage of new synthetic catabolic and anabolic steroids provides a limitless opportunity for study of basic metabolic problems of proteins and amino acids (Luetscher and Lieberman, 1958). Some of these possibilities are touched upon in other sections of this volume. It is clear from the evidence on hand that control of the nitrogen depletion effects of the corticoids can be achieved in part by protein supplementation of the dietary and, in some instances, by administration of small quantities of some of the essential amino acids. Similarly, it appears that effects of some anabolic steroids may be enhanced by amino acid fortification of the dietary. Closer scrutiny of this nutritional synergism may lead to attainment of maximal anabolism at very small dosage levels of these steroids, and thereby a reduction in the incidence of virilism and other untoward effects.

C. HYPOGLYCEMIC AGENTS

The fortuitous observation of Janbon *et al.* (1942) that the newer sulfonamides produced a disorder very similar to hypoglycemia, led to Loubatiere's studies (1957) on the mechanism of action of the sulfonylureas in diabetes, and eventually to an evaluation of these substances for the control of diabetes (Dolger, 1957). A pilot study on two diabetics given rather large doses of tolbutamide for about 2 weeks showed no changes in respiratory quotient in either subject, and a slightly negative nitrogen balance in one (Goetz, 1957). McGavack and associates (1957) observed that whereas 1 gm. daily of carbutamide did not influence the uptake of radioiodine, 2 gm. daily of carbutamide progressively depressed I^{131} uptake to 56% of the control value at the end of the ninth week of treatment.

Numerous reports have appeared implicating salicylates in carbohy-

hydrate metabolism, particularly the reported ability of aspirin to lower blood sugar levels in diabetics (Smith, 1953). A definite hypoglycemic effect of salicylates was demonstrated in rheumatic fever patients by Albanese and co-workers (1955). Results of the study which involved ten subjects (5-18 years) indicated that the magnitude of fasting hypoglycemia produced by aspirin bears a direct relationship to the duration and dosage of therapy, and the age and weight of the patient. Subsequent studies by this group (Albanese, 1959) have disclosed that the hypoglycemia of prolonged and massive salicylate therapy is sometimes accompanied by a persistent decrease in fasting plasma amino nitrogen levels—a sensitive criterion of protein nutrition.

A further and heretofore unsuspected relationship of amino acid and carbohydrate metabolism has been described by Seltzer and Smith (1958). These investigators reported that in normal subjects and in mild or severe diabetics, tolbutamide (Orinase) and indole-3-acetic acid, a physiological end product of tryptophan metabolism, exerted identical effects on blood glucose and plasma insulin activity in the same individuals.

D. PHRENOTROPIC DRUGS

The pharmacology of this rapidly growing family of substances was thoroughly reviewed in 1957 by a very able conference group (Kety, 1957). The psychotherapeutic activity of some of the agents in common use was reported to correlate well with their inhibition of oxidative phosphorylations (Fig. 1) and/or cytochrome oxidase. Preliminary observations (Abood and Romanchek, 1957) have disclosed that many indole substances and derivatives of the urine of phenylketonurics are also formidable inhibitors of cellular oxidations and phosphorylations. Recently, these aromatic substances, which are metabolically derived from tyrosine and tryptophan, were suspected of a possible role in the biogenesis of schizophrenia-producing compounds.

It is interesting to note in this connection that dietary deficits of niacin, which is also derived biosynthetically from tryptophan, have been implicated in the etiology of various psychiatric symptoms which were relieved by niacin administration (Jolliffe *et al.*, 1940). Isoniazid, an isomer of nicotinic acid, has been observed to produce marked euphoria early in experimental trials in tuberculosis (Bennett *et al.*, 1954).

From the foregoing, it is apparent that investigations on the biochemical properties of proteins and amino acids may have ramifications in many areas far removed from their nutritive functions. Also, from the preceding, as well as the pages which follow, it will become abundantly