

ADVANCES
IN
IMMUNOPHARMACOLOGY
2

ADVANCES IN IMMUNOPHARMACOLOGY 2

*Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Immunopharmacology
July 1982, Washington, USA*

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PERGAMON PRESS

OXFORD · NEW YORK · TORONTO · SYDNEY · PARIS · FRANKFURT

U.K.	Pergamon Press Ltd., Headington Hill Hall, Oxford OX3 0BW, England
U.S.A.	Pergamon Press Inc., Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, New York 10523, U.S.A.
CANADA	Pergamon Press Canada Ltd., Suite 104, 150 Consumers Road, Willowdale, Ontario M2J 1P9, Canada
AUSTRALIA	Pergamon Press (Aust.) Pty. Ltd., P.O. Box 544, Potts Point, N.S.W. 2011, Australia
FRANCE	Pergamon Press SARL, 24 rue des Ecoles, 75240 Paris, Cedex 05, France
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY	Pergamon Press GmbH, Hammerweg 6, D-6242 Kronberg-Taunus, Federal Republic of Germany

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First edition 1983

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

International Conference on Immunopharmacology (2nd: 1982 : Washington, D.C.)

Advances in immunopharmacology 2.

Includes bibliographies and indexes.

1. Immunopharmacology—Congresses. I. Hadden, John W. II. Title.

III. Title: Advances in immunopharmacology two.

[DNLM: 1. Immunosuppression—Congresses. 2. Immunotherapy—Congresses. 3. Pharmacology—Congresses.

W3 IN181W 2nd 1982a/QW 940 I61 1982a]

RM370.I57 1982 615'.7 83-4162

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

International Conference on Immunopharmacology .

2nd: 1982: Washington, D.C.

Advances in immunopharmacology 2.

1. Immune response—Regulation—Congresses

2. Immunotherapy—Congresses

I. Title II. Hadden, J.

615'.7 QR186

ISBN 0-08-029775-7

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Pharmacology — Toxicology

Pharmacology — Toxicology

Phenytoin and Humoral Immunity: Background and a Pharmacokinetic Interpretation of Recent Findings

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ABSTRACT

A number of reports have demonstrated that phenytoin may alter humoral immune function. After a brief review of some of the reported findings, we present our own observations of the effects of both phenytoin and its major metabolite, 5-(p-hydroxyphenyl)-5-phenylhydantoin (HPPH) in mice. *In vitro* pre-incubation of mice spleen cells with phenytoin (10, 20, 50mg/L) but not HPPH, was found to increase the number of plaque forming cells (Jerne plaque assay). *In vivo*, however, both compounds upon repeated dosing for 3 and 7 weeks, appear to be immunosuppressive as determined using this assay system. At the highest dose (50mg/kg) schedule studied, however, phenytoin demonstrated great variation in its effects.

It is suggested that phenytoin *per se* may be immune-enhancing whereas, its metabolite(s) is immunosuppressive. If this assumption is valid, then the variation in phenytoin's effects on humoral immunity at high doses may be explained by the known unique nonlinear pharmacokinetic characteristics of this drug.

KEYWORDS

Phenytoin; 5-(p-hydroxyphenyl)-5-phenylhydantoin; humoral immunity; plaque forming cells; pharmacokinetics; nonlinear kinetics; immunosuppression.

INTRODUCTION

Although phenytoin (diphenylhydantoin; Figure 1) is widely recognized as a safe and effective drug in the treatment of major epilepsy, there are a number of reports indicating that this agent may be associated with immunological changes in epileptic patients and experimental animals. (Mackinney and Booker, 1972; Sorrell and Forbes, 1975; Seager, *et al*, 1975; Levo, *et al*, 1975; Bluming, *et al*, 1976; Fontana, *et al*, 1976; Fossan, 1977; Hornby and Mullen, 1977; Queiroz and Mullen, 1980; Thatcher, *et al*, 1982; Dosch, *et al*, 1982; Gilhus, *et al*, 1982; Gilhus, 1983). Phenytoin has been extensively studied but is not unique in this regard since other anti-epileptic drugs also appear to be capable of causing immunological changes (Sorrell and Forbes, 1975; Queiroz and Mullen, 1980; Gilhus, *et al*, 1982).

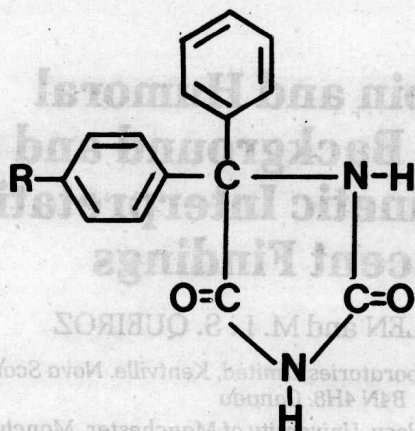


Fig. 1 The structure of phenytoin (diphenylhydantoin; R=H) and its major metabolite 5-(p-hydroxyphenyl)-5-phenylhydantoin (HPPH; R=OH).

HUMAN STUDIES

Phenytoin has been shown: to induce a lymphopenia at high serum concentrations (MacKinney and Booker, 1972); to reduce *in vitro* lymphocyte responses to the (T-cell) mitogen phytohaemagglutinin (Sorrell and Forbes, 1975; Thatcher, *et al.*, 1982) and the mixed-lymphocyte culture reaction (Bluming, *et al.*, 1976); to lower serum and salivary IgA levels (Seager, *et al.*, 1975; Fontana, *et al.*, 1976), an observation occurring with greater frequency in patients possessing the HLA-A₂ antigen (Gilhus, *et al.*, 1982); to reduce the number of cells forming "E rosettes" following *in vitro* exposure (Hornby and Mullen, 1977; Gilhus, 1983); and, rarely, to be associated with certain lymphoproliferative disorders (Lapes, *et al.*, 1976). Recently, Dosch and coworkers (1982), reported abnormal suppressor T-cell activity concomitant with hypogammaglobulinemia in a child who had developed a pronounced generalized edema, rash and lymphadenopathy while receiving phenytoin for one year.

ANIMAL STUDIES

In mice, orally administered (two months) phenytoin was found to produce distinct histological changes in various lymphoid tissues (Kruger, 1970).

Levo, *et al.*, (1975) reported that daily subcutaneous injection of phenytoin (500 µg per mouse) for periods up to 14 days did not affect Concanavalin A-induced transformation of spleen cells, although absolute spleen cell numbers were reduced. These workers also noted that subcutaneously administered phenytoin caused a significant reduction in humoral immunity as detected using the plaque-forming cell assay technique (Jerne, *et al.*, 1963). Interestingly, phenytoin also afforded protection against urethane induced lung adenomas. On the basis of their findings, Levo, *et al.*, (1975) concluded that in mice, phenytoin depressed mainly humoral immune function, which was in turn, somehow (decrease in blocking factors?) capable of providing protection against urethane-induced tumors.