Study of serum electrolytes and minerals in hypothyroidism

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Abstract

Background of the study: Hypothyroidism is known to affect electrolyte, fat, protein and carbohydrate metabolism. Though the effects of thyroid hormones on lipid profile has been well established, the effects on electrolytes and certain minerals like calcium, magnesium and phosphorus is not clear and the underlying mechanisms responsible for these changes are not well understood. Aim and objectives: The objective was to find out the effects of hypothyroidism on certain electrolytes and minerals levels. Materials and methods: The study was carried out in Department of Physiology in collaboration with Medicine, Endocrinology and Biochemistry. 100 cases of overt hypothyroidism of both genders aged 25-60 years were chosen, 100 age and sex matched healthy controls were chosen. Blood samples were collected from them and serum TSH, total T3, T4, sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and phosphorus levels were measured. The values of the above parameters of cases and controls were compared and statistical analysis was made. Results: It was found that the levels of serum sodium, potassium and calcium were significantly decreased in cases than the controls. Serum magnesium and phosphorus were significantly elevated in cases than controls. Conclusion: From this study we were able to conclude that higher the TSH levels, higher will be serum magnesium and phosphorus in the blood and lower will be serum sodium, potassium and calcium levels.

Key words: Electrolytes, Hypothyroidism, Minerals, T3, T4, TSH

Introduction

Hypothyroidism is a clinical entity resulting from the deficiency of thyroid hormones or from their impaired activity. It is a common metabolic disorder in the general population [1]. In India 42 million people are suffering from thyroid diseases, hypothyroidism being the commonest thyroid disorder [2]. Hypothyroidism is 10 times more common in women than men and its prevalence increases with age [3]. Higher prevalence of thyroid disease in women suggests that estrogen might be involved in pathology of thyroid dysfunction. Estradiol has an antagonistic effect on hormones T3 and T4. The reason being estradiol competes with T3 and T4 for binding sites on the receptor proteins [4, 5]. Hypothyroidism is accompanied by remarkable alterations in the metabolism of water and electrolytes [6, 7]. Sodium and potassium are important components of the enzyme sodium potassium ATPase which is a cell membrane enzyme that helps in transport of water and nutrients across the cell membrane. Thyroid hormones regulate the activity of sodium potassium pumps in most of the tissue [8]. Prospective studies show that hypothyroidism is associated with Hyponatremia [9, 10,11,]. An impaired urinary dilution capacity due to non-osmotic release of antidiuretic hormone as well as increased urinary sodium loss is the major mechanism for hypothyroid induced hyponatremia in rats [12]. Thyroid hormones modulate the expression of sodium potassium ATPase mRNA and protein and hence regulate the activity of this critical component of renal sodium transport [13]. Hypothyroidism could be a cause of hypokalemia. According to Saruta T et al plasma Renin Activity (PRA) and plasma Aldosterone (PA) may be suppressed in hypothyroidism probably due to...
dysfunction of juxtaglomerular cells and glomerulosa cells in zona glomerulosa respectively and the possibility that suppression of PRA and PA in patients with hypothyroidism is related to exaggerated sodium excretion and decrease in potassium excretion cannot be ruled out (Saruta T et al 1980) [14]. In hypothyroidism, because of low potassium level and increased intracellular sodium concentration results in accumulation of water inside the cells and causing edema. Mineral metabolism like calcium, magnesium and phosphorus is frequently disturbed in thyroid dysfunctions.

Thyroid hormones exert its effects on osteoblasts via nuclear receptors to stimulate bone resorption. [15]. In hypothyroidism there is a depressed turn over due to impaired mobilization of calcium into bone and leads to decrease in blood calcium level. In hypothyroidism increased production of calcitonin can promote tubular reabsorption of phosphate and tubular excretion of calcium [16]. Serum magnesium and phosphorus levels are increased in hypothyroidism [17, 18].

Materials and Methods

The present work was carried out in the Department of Physiology in collaboration with the Department of Medicine, Endocrinology and Biochemistry in IMS and SUM Hospital, Bhubaneswar, on patients attending outpatient department and admitted in the Medicine and Endocrinology Department of the same college and Hospital, in the period of January 2014 to July 2015. The study type was case-control. The study included 100 clinically established hypothyroid cases and 100 healthy individuals as control groups of both sexes. All the patients having overt hypothyroidism of either sex between the ages 25-60 years were included in the study. Pediatric age group patients with renal disorders, hepatic disorders, bone disorders and diabetes mellitus and patients on medication e.g. diuretics, calcium and iron tablets were excluded in the study. Method of analysis was by taking 2 ml of venous blood sample was drawn from cases and controls and serum was separated. Following Biochemical investigations were carried out in both cases and controls. A. Thyroid hormone Assay: total serum T3, total serum T4, Serum TSH which were measured by E.C.L.I.A (Electro Chemi Luminescence Immuno Assay) method on cobase 411 and serum required for these was 500µl.B. Serum levels of the following electrolytes and minerals were measured. Serum electrolytes like sodium and potassium were done on ILyte and serum minerals like calcium, magnesium and phosphorus were done on Auto analyser 400+ and serum required for these tests was 400µl. Total serum sodium level by ISE (Ion sensitive electrode) method, total serum Potassium by ISE (Ion sensitive electrode) method, total serum Calcium by O-Cresolphthaleincomplexone method, total serum Magnesium by Chlorophosphonazo III method, total serum Phosphorus by Phosphomolybddate UV method.

Results

A total of 100 cases and 100 controls were studied. Among the cases 30 (30%) were male and 70 (70%) were female. In the control group 37 (37%) were male and 53 (53%) were female. There were more females than males among cases. There was also more number of females than males in control group.

Table No.-1: Age distribution of cases and control.

| Age in years | Cases | Control |
|--------------|-------|---------|
| <30          | 29    | 15      |
| 31-40        | 51    | 42      |
| 41-50        | 15    | 31      |
| >50          | 5     | 12      |
| Total Mean±SD| 35.69±8.0487 | 40.04±8.1986 |

Table No. 1 shows the highest number (51%) of cases belonged to the age group 31-40 years. The mean age of case was 35.6900±8.0487 with S.E of mean was 0.80487.

Also there were significant more number of euthyroids in 31-40 years of age in control groups. The mean age of control was 40.04±8.1986 with S.E of mean was 0.8198.
Table No.-2: Comparison of serum TSH, T3 and T4 in two groups studied.

| Lab variables | Hypothyroid cases (n=100) | Healthy controls (n=100) | t value | p value |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|
|               | Mean±SEM                  | Mean±SEM                 |         |         |
| TSH (µIU/ml)  | 59.4475±4.14390           | 1.6567±0.07418           | 13.94   | <0.001* |
| T3 (ng/dl)    | 48.4532±2.76735           | 101.2810±1.57358         | 16.594  | <0.001* |
| T4 (µg/dl)    | 2.9349±0.13874            | 8.5377±0.13528           | 28.913  | <0.001* |

Table No. 2 shows when serum levels of TSH, T3 and T4 of cases and controls were compared a significant variation was seen. Serum TSH levels in Hypothyroid cases were found to be significantly increased when compared to healthy controls (p<0.001). Serum levels of T3 and T4 in hypothyroid cases were found to be significantly decreased when compared to healthy controls (p<0.001).

Table No.-3: Comparison of serum Sodium(Na), Potassium(K) and Calcium(Ca) levels in cases and controls.

| Lab variables | Hypothyroid cases (n=100) | Healthy controls (n=100) | t value | p value |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|
|               | Mean±SEM                  | Mean±SEM                 |         |         |
| Sodium(meq/L) | 129.448±0.3083            | 141.0600±0.19113         | 36.462  | <0.001* |
| Potassium(meq/L)| 3.0942±0.0401            | 3.9683±0.0340            | 24.070  | <0.001* |
| Calcium(mg/dl)| 7.9243±0.0285             | 9.3151±0.0420            | 27.384  | <0.001* |

Table No. 3 shows when serum levels of sodium, potassium and calcium of cases and controls were compared a significant variation was seen. The levels of calcium and sodium were significantly decreased in cases when compared to controls (p<0.001). Serum potassium levels were found to be less than that of controls and difference was statistically significant (p<0.001).

Table No-4: Comparison of serum Magnesium and Phosphorus levels in cases and controls.

| Lab variables | Hypothyroid cases (n=100) | Healthy controls (n=100) | t value | p value |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|
|               | Mean±SEM                  | Mean±SEM                 |         |         |
| Phosphorus(mg/dl)| 4.9382±0.0147            | 3.3344±0.2001            | 7.99    | <0.001* |
| Magnesium(mg/dl)| 2.9131±0.0278             | 2.1418±0.0274            | 19.72   | <0.001* |

Table No. 4 shows when serum levels of phosphorus and magnesium of cases and controls were compared a significant variation was seen. Among the minerals, phosphorus and magnesium levels in serum were elevated in patients with hypothyroidism when compared to controls and the difference was statistically significant (p<0.001).

Discussion

Hypothyroidism is a condition in which the body suffers from insufficient thyroid hormones. Since thyroid hormones act as a central regulator of various body functions and control various metabolisms, more importantly lipid metabolism and that of various electrolytes, the hypothyroid patients generally suffer from a slow metabolism resulting in dyslipidemias and electrolyte disturbances. Hypothyroidism is a very common condition and seen more in females than males. The present study showed majority of the patients were women (70%) and in the age group of 31 to 40 years which is in accordance with study done by RoopaMurgod et al (Roopa M et al 2012) [19]. The higher prevalence of thyroid disease in women suggests that estrogen might be involved in the pathophysiology of thyroid dysfunction. Estradiol has an antagonistic effect on the hormones T3 and T4. The reason being, estradiol competes with T3 and T4 for binding sites on the receptor proteins (Vasudevan N et al, 2002) [5]. Gantus MA et al studied the effects of estrogen on a homogeneous stromal cell population (TS7 cells) of rat thyroid gland. Their results point to the cytokine transforming growth factor beta-1 (TGF-ß1)/transcription factor Smad-2 signaling pathway as a putative target of estrogen actions on thyroid stromal cells (Gantus MA et al, 2011) [4]. In the present study
the serum sodium and potassium levels were significantly decreased in cases of hypothyroidism as compared to healthy controls (p<0.001). Our study is in conformity with the study done by Roopa M et al, Schwarz [20], and Jaskiran Kaur [21]. According to them, thyroid hormones regulate the activity of sodium potassium pumps in most of the tissues (Ismail Beigi F and Edelman IS, 1971) [8]. In hypothyroidism, because of low potassium levels, and because of deficiency of thyroid hormones, this enzyme is affected, resulting in accumulation of water inside the cells and causing oedema. This is said to be one of the mechanisms responsible for weight gain seen in hypothyroid patients. Study done by Bradley SE et al [22] observed low sodium levels in hypothyroid rats. In the rats, hypothyroidism is associated with a decrease in renal plasma flow and glomerular filtration rate and a limited urinary concentrating ability and an impairment in the renal conservation of sodium. The higher urinary sodium excretion leads to a subtle salt wasting and an exaggerated natriuretic response to extracellular fluid expansion. Our study is in conformity with the study done by Bradley et al. Our findings were contradictory to AbedelmulaM, et al where a significant increase in serum potassium levels was seen in hypothyroid patients (Abedelmula M et al, 2013) [23]. In our study total calcium levels in serum were found to be significantly lowered in hypothyroid patients when compared to controls (p<0.001) which is in accordance with the study done by Roopa M et al and Suneel B et al. Thyroxine normally regulates blood calcium levels by releasing calcium from the cells. In hypothyroidism, there is less thyroxine in the blood stream; thus less thyroxine enters the cells and less calcium is released. In the present study the serum magnesium levels were significantly increased in hypothyroid patients when compared to controls (p<0.001) which is in accordance with Roopa M et al, Frizel et al [17, 19] and McCaffrey et al [24] According to McCaffrey plasma magnesium tends to be elevated in hypothyroid rats presumably as a result of renal retention which has been thought to be the result of hypofiltration (McCaffrey C and Quanme GA,1984). In the present study serum phosphorus levels were markedly increased in cases of hypothyroidism as compared to healthy controls (p<0.001) which is in accordance with study done by Roopa M et al, Suneel B et al [19, 25] and Al- Tonsi et al [18]. Suneel B et al studied mineral status in patients of thyroid disorders (Hypo and Hyper) and found decreased calcium and increased phosphorus level in hypothyroidism mainly due to influence of PTH and calcitonin (Suneel B et al 2011).

Conclusion
In this study we found that when the cases and controls were compared, there was a significant variation in the values between the studied groups. The TSH level was significantly increased in cases as compared to controls. Total T3 and total T4 level was significantly decreased in cases as compared to controls. The present study showed maximum number of hypothyroid patients (51%) belonged to the age group 31-40 years and there were more females than males among cases. The present study showed that there was a positive correlation between serum TSH and serum magnesium and phosphorus level and a negative correlation between serum TSH and serum sodium, potassium and calcium level. Our study demonstrated that hypothyroid patients showed low total sodium, potassium and calcium levels and increased serum magnesium and phosphorus levels. Hence monitoring of serum levels of these electrolytes and minerals during the follow up of hypothyroid cases will be of great benefit. Also, such disturbances need to be monitored at least once or twice per year and treated appropriately to avoid the ill effects resulting from the changes in their serum levels.

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