Effect of Different Extenders on the Sperm Quality Parameters of Hu Ram Semen Preserved at 16°C

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Article ID: KVFD-2020-24783 Received: 28.07.2020 Accepted: 03.12.2020 Published Online: 05.12.2020

Abstract

The purpose of this experiment was to determine the effects of different extenders on the sperm quality parameters of Hu ram semen preserved at 16°C. The quality parameters studied include total sperm motility, progressive motility, survival time, plasma membrane integrity, acrosome integrity and some kinematic parameters, such as the curvilinear velocity. Each ram ejaculated approximately twenty times and ejaculates were collected every two days interval during breeding season. Three Hu rams were used in experiments. The ejaculates were pooled and diluted (1:10) with extenders A (Tris-Fructose based), B (Fructose-Sodium Citrate based), C (Glucose based), D (Fructose based) and E (Control, Physiological saline solution) and then stored at 16°C. The above parameters were detected every 24 h. The total sperm motility, progressive motility, acrosome integrity and some kinematic parameters of extender A were the highest compared to those of other extenders and decreased slowly within 24 to 144 h. The effective survival time of sperm preserved in extender A was 74.50±4.82 h, and the total survival time was 412.67±2.52 h, which was significantly higher than those of the other four extenders (P≤0.05). The acrosome integrity of extender A was the highest within 24 to 144 h and significantly higher than those of the other extenders within 48 to 144 h (P≤0.05). Compared with the other extenders, extender A had numerically the highest plasma membrane integrity within 24 to 96 h of preservation (P>0.05). In conclusion, extender A improved the sperm quality of Hu ram semen, which could be used for artificial insemination for up to 144 h of preservation.

Keywords: Hu Ram, 16 ºC, Semen extender, Semen quality

Farklı Sperm Sulandırıcılarının 16°C’de Saklanan Hu Koç Sperm Kalitesi Parametreleri Üzerine Etkisi

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, farklı sperm sulandırıcılarının 16°C’de saklanan Hu koç sperm kalitesi parametreleri üzerindeki etkilerini belirlemekti. İncelenen kalite parametreleri arasında toplam sperm motilitesi, progresif motilite, canlı kalma süresi, plazma membran bütünlüğü, akrozom bütünlüğü ve eğrisel hız gibi bazı kinematik parametreler bulunuyordu. Her koçtan yaklaşık yirmi kez sperm alındı ve üreme mevsimi boyunca koçlardan iki günde bir ejekülat toplandi. Deneylerde üç Hu koç kullanıldı. Ejekülatlar havuz oluşturulduktan sonra, 1:10 oranında sırasıyla A (Tris-Fructoz bazı), B (Fructoz-Sodyum Sıtrat bazı), C (Glukoz bazı), D (Fructoz bazı) ve E (Kontrol, Fizyolojik tuzlu su) sulandırıcıları ile seyredildi ve sona 16°C’de muhafaza edildi. Adı geçen parametreler her 24 saatte bir tespit edildi. A sulandırıcısının kullandığı gruptaki toplam sperm motilitesi, progresif motilite, akrozom bütünlüğü ve bazı kinematik parametrelerdi diğer sulandırıcılara oranla en yüksek sapıtı ve bu özellikler 24 ile 144 saat içinde yavaş yavaş azaldı. A sulandırıcısının kullandığı gruptaki spermlerin etkin canlılık süresi 74.50±4.82 saat ve toplam canlılık süresi 412.67±2.52 saat iken, bu değerler diğer dört sulandırcıdan çok daha yüksek sapıtı (P<0.05). A sulandırıcısının kullandığı gruptaki spermlerin akrozom bütünlüğü 24 ile 144 saat içinde en yüksek ve bu değerler diğer sulandırcılarla kıyaslandığında A sulandırcısının, 24 ile 96 saatlik sperm muhafazasında sayılan olarak en yüksek plazma membran bütünlüğüne sahip olduğu sapıtı (P>0.05). Sonuç olarak, A sperm sulandırcısının, suni tohumlama için kullanılmak üzere 144 saat kadar muhafaza süresince sperm kalitesini artırırdığı belirlendi.

Anahtar sözcükler: Hu koçu, 16°C, Sperm sulandırısı, Sperm kalitesi

How to cite this article?

Zhang L, Sohail T, Li Y, Wang Y, Chu C, Feng Y, Ma J: Effect of different extenders on the sperm quality parameters of Hu Ram semen preserved at 16°C. Kafkas Univ Vet Fak Derg. 27 (1): 83-91, 2021.

DOI: 10.9775/kvfd.2020.24783

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**INTRODUCTION**

Hu ram is a world-famous prolific sheep breed that has the advantages of two births a year and rapid growth and development; thus, the breeding scale of Hu ram is expanding rapidly [1]. Artificial insemination is a basic technology in livestock reproduction [2], which can make full use of the semen of superior male animals [3]. It is an important means to improve the reproductive efficiency and productivity of livestock [4].

Artificial insemination technology combined with the application of estrus synchronization technology can reduce breeding costs, prevent the spread of diseases, and achieve large-scale feeding and management [8]. Semen preservation is a key link in artificial insemination [9]. Semen preservation is usually divided into 16°C preservation, 4°C preservation and cryopreservation [7]. Owing to the presence of large amounts of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) in ram sperm plasma membranes and the absence of a robust antioxidant system in ram sperm and seminal plasma, ram sperm is highly sensitive to cryopreservation [10-18], which limits semen cryopreservation in sheep [11,12]. In production, semen is mostly preserved at 16°C, which has the advantages of simple operation and suitability for popularization and application, without special temperature control and refrigeration equipment; it also has practical application value.

At present, 4°C preservation and cryopreservation are the research focus of ram semen preservation [13]. There are relatively few reports on the preservation of ram semen at 16°C, and there are even fewer extender formulas described. However, most of the semen preserved at 16°C is used in production. This experiment is based on the extender used for 4°C or cryopreservation of ram semen. Extenders with better preservation were screened. Substances such as cryoprotectants were removed so as not to adversely affect semen preserved at 16°C. In the experiment evaluating the preservation of ram semen at 16°C, an excellent extender formula was selected. Arando et al. [14] indicated that OVIX has the best commercial extender for preservation of ram semen at 16°C. Total sperm motility preserved in the extender decreased to 40% in 96 h, and sperm progressive motility decreased to 20% in 96 h. Although the commercial extender has a good preservation effect, it is still far from meeting the needs of production. To prolong the storage time of semen at 16°C, therefore, extenders A (Tris-Fructose based), B (Fructose-Sodium Citrate based), C (Glucose based), D (Fructose based) and E (Control, Physiological saline solution) were used to preserve ram semen at 16°C in this experiment. The experiment objectively evaluated and screened an extender formula with the best preservation effect of ram semen at 16°C.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Animals and Semen Collection**

Three 2- to 3-years-old male Hu sheep having Body condition score (BCS) ≥3 (scale 1-5) kept in the experimental sheep farm were used in this study. They were fed 0.2 kg concentrate/once, twice a day, and ad libitum hay and water. The experiment trimmed the ram abdomen and wash the foreskin with saline. A total number of 60 ejaculates were collected from the rams every two days interval in the morning by the artificial vaginal (AV) between October and December 2019. The water temperature in the AV was kept at 40~42°C. Ensure a certain degree of lubrication and pressure in the AV. It was brought back to the laboratory at 37°C within 20 min. The semen volume of each ram collected was about 1.5 mL, which was milky white and had no abnormal smell. The quality assessment was carried out quickly and only the total motility >80% and the morphologically abnormal sperm <15% were accepted. The ejaculates collected from the three rams were pooled and processed to eliminate variability. Semen sampling procedure was approved by the Animal care committee of the Yangzhou University.

**Preparation of Semen Extender**

Five different extenders, A (Tris-Fructose based), B (Fructose-Sodium Citrate based), C (Glucose based), D (Fructose based) and E (Control, Physiological saline solution), were prepared according to the ingredients and doses shown in Table 1.

**Sperm Quality Evaluation**

Total sperm motility, progressive motility and kinematic parameters were measured by CASA. Plasma membrane integrity was detected by HOST [15]. Acrosome integrity was detected by Coomassie brilliant blue staining [16]. The time when the sperm progressive motility is above 60% is called the effective survival time; when total sperm motility drops to zero, the time when all sperm die is called the total survival time [17].

**Statistical Analysis of Data**

All the test data were analyzed by SPSS25.0 statistical software. All results were expressed as mean values±SD. When the P value was significant (P≤0.05), Duncan's multiple range tests by ANOVA procedure were used to compare the mean value of the total sperm motility, progressive motility, kinematic parameters, plasma membrane integrity and acrosome integrity.

**RESULTS**

**Effects of Different Extenders on Total Sperm Motility**

As seen in Table 2, the total sperm motility decreased with the extension of storage time when five kinds of extenders were used to preserve Hu ram semen at 16°C. Among them, the total sperm motility of extender A decreased steadily and slowly. Within 24 to 96 h of preservation, the total motility of sperm preserved in extender A was significantly decreased to 20% in 96 h. Although the commercial extender...
higher than those in the other four extenders (P≤0.05). At 120 h of preservation, the total sperm motility of extender A was significantly higher than those of the other four extenders (P≤0.05). At 144 h of preservation, the total sperm motility in extender A was the highest and significantly higher than that in extender D (P≤0.05), but there was no significant difference between extender A and extender B (P>0.05).

Effects of Different Extenders on the Different Sperm Kinematic Parameters

As seen in Table 4, the results showed that the straight line velocity (VSL), curvilinear velocity (VCL), average path velocity (VAP), amplitude of lateral head displacement (ALH), and average motion degree (MAD) of sperm decreased with the extension of storage time. Among them, the decline of extender A was steady and slow. At 24 h of preservation, the VSL of sperm preserved in extender A was significantly higher than that in extenders B, C and E (Control) (P≤0.05), but not significantly different from that in extender D (P>0.05). At 24 h of preservation, the wobble movement coefficient (WOB) of sperm preserved in extender A was significantly higher than those in the other four extenders (P≤0.05). At 144 h of preservation, the sperm progressive motility of extender A was significantly higher than those of the other four extenders (P≤0.05). At 144 h of preservation, the sperm progressive motility of extender A was the highest, but the difference was not significant (P>0.05).
### Table 3. Effects of different extenders on the progressive motility of preserved sperm (mean±SD); %

| Storage Time | A      | B      | C      | D      | E (Control) |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| 0 h          | 79.58±5.17abc | 83.93±8.70a  | 70.34±1.35b  | 72.97±5.66b  | 78.44±5.50ab |
| 24 h         | 79.52±5.60a  | 51.59±3.05a  | 5.84±3.08b   | 33.64±2.21b  | 0.59±0.20b   |
| 48 h         | 72.10±1.82a  | 45.79±3.37b  | 0.36±0.28a   | 8.10±2.42a   | -            |
| 72 h         | 63.01±6.07b  | 35.54±5.62b  | -            | 8.26±1.50b   | -            |
| 96 h         | 42.83±10.48bc| 19.25±5.50c  | -            | 5.36±2.44c   | -            |
| 120 h        | 17.07±5.65a  | 6.40±3.75b   | -            | 0.89±0.27b   | -            |
| 144 h        | 2.04±1.18b   | 0.83±0.86b   | -            | 0.24±0.01b   | -            |

**Values within the same row with different letters differ significantly (P≤0.05); - means that the sperm have all died, losing the significance of detection**

### Table 4. Effects of different extenders on the different kinematic parameters of preserved sperm (mean±SD)

| Kinematic Parameter | Storage Time | A      | B      | C      | D      | E (Control) |
|---------------------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| VSL (μm/s)          | 0 h          | 38.01±0.64bc | 39.21±2.74a  | 40.03±1.86a  | 35.63±1.72a  | 40.58±0.69a  |
|                     | 24 h         | 35.91±2.68a  | 24.09±1.21bc | 16.63±2.89a  | 26.79±0.50ac | 14.61±11.57c |
|                     | 48 h         | 30.44±3.00a  | 26.28±0.81b  | 5.90±3.38d   | 19.17±0.94c  | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 27.24±1.78a  | 24.29±1.59c  | -            | 22.65±1.33a  | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 21.94±2.45a  | 21.24±2.03c  | -            | 18.86±4.26e  | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 17.58±1.49a  | 17.42±1.75b  | -            | 11.58±3.16a  | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 12.28±2.81a  | 8.68±9.13c   | -            | 4.64±0.42a   | -            |
| VCL (μm/s)          | 0 h          | 73.80±2.37a  | 71.34±1.27a  | 71.29±3.89a  | 63.18±3.08e  | 73.27±4.97a  |
|                     | 24 h         | 76.01±3.98a  | 57.55±2.68a  | 37.20±7.86a  | 56.23±0.38a  | 27.86±2.64c  |
|                     | 48 h         | 65.19±4.77a  | 58.04±2.82a  | 8.90±4.13a   | 39.39±0.76a  | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 59.10±3.31a  | 43.87±5.89a  | -            | 41.40±2.51a  | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 47.58±4.17a  | 39.85±5.80a  | -            | 44.60±5.94c  | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 40.61±3.18a  | 31.66±2.57a  | -            | 34.03±6.78a  | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 29.65±9.64a  | 15.60±17.07a | -            | 8.39±2.45c   | -            |
| VAP (μm/s)          | 0 h          | 52.19±1.68a  | 50.45±0.90a  | 50.41±2.75a  | 44.67±2.17a  | 51.81±3.52a  |
|                     | 24 h         | 53.75±2.61a  | 40.69±1.89a  | 26.31±5.56a  | 39.76±0.27a  | 19.70±14.59a |
|                     | 48 h         | 46.10±3.37a  | 41.04±1.99a  | 6.29±2.92a   | 27.85±0.54a  | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 41.79±2.34a  | 30.88±4.17a  | -            | 29.28±1.78a  | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 33.64±2.95a  | 28.18±4.10a  | -            | 31.53±4.19a  | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 28.72±2.25a  | 22.38±1.82a  | -            | 24.06±4.79a  | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 20.97±6.81a  | 11.03±12.07a | -            | 5.94±1.74a   | -            |
| ALH (μm)            | 0 h          | 21.62±0.70a  | 20.90±0.38a  | 20.88±1.14a  | 18.51±0.90a  | 21.46±1.46a  |
|                     | 24 h         | 22.26±1.17a  | 16.86±0.78a  | 10.90±2.31a  | 16.47±0.11a  | 8.16±6.05a   |
|                     | 48 h         | 19.10±1.40a  | 17.00±0.83a  | 2.60±2.12a   | 11.54±0.23a  | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 17.31±0.97a  | 12.79±1.73a  | -            | 12.13±0.74a  | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 13.93±1.22a  | 11.67±1.70a  | -            | 13.07±1.74a  | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 11.89±0.93a  | 9.27±0.76a   | -            | 9.97±1.99a   | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 8.69±2.82a   | 4.57±5.00a   | -            | 2.46±0.72a   | -            |
| LIN (%)             | 0 h          | 0.52±0.01a   | 0.55±0.03ac  | 0.57±0.01c   | 0.56±0.03ac  | 0.55±0.03ac  |
|                     | 24 h         | 0.47±0.01a   | 0.42±0.00a   | 0.46±0.02a   | 0.47±0.01a   | 0.35±0.22a   |
|                     | 48 h         | 0.47±0.01a   | 0.45±0.01b   | 0.30±0.17a   | 0.49±0.02a   | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 0.46±0.01a   | 0.56±0.05b   | -            | 0.55±0.01a   | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 0.46±0.01a   | 0.53±0.03c   | -            | 0.43±0.04a   | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 0.43±0.02a   | 0.55±0.01b   | -            | 0.30±0.09a   | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 0.38±0.08a   | 0.32±0.29a   | -            | 0.20±0.04a   | -            |

**Values within the same row with different letters differ significantly (P≤0.05); - means that the sperm have all died, losing the significance of detection**
the highest, and there was a significant difference between extender A and extender E (Control) (P ≤ 0.05). At 48 h of preservation, the VSL of sperm preserved in extender A was significantly higher than those in the other four extenders (P ≤ 0.05). The WOB of sperm preserved in extender A was the highest, and there was significant difference between extender A and extender C (P ≤ 0.05). At 72 and 96 h, the WOB of sperm preserved in extender A was the highest and significantly higher than that in extender B (P ≤ 0.05), but there was no significant difference between extender A and extender D (P > 0.05). The VCL, VAP and ALH of sperm preserved in extender A were significantly higher than those in the other four extenders within 24 to 72 h (P ≤ 0.05). At 96 h of preservation, the VCL, VAP and ALH of sperm preserved in extender A were the highest, but there were no significant differences between extender A and the other extenders (P > 0.05). At 120 h of preservation, the VCL, VAP and ALH of sperm preserved in extender A were the highest and were significantly higher than those in extender B (P ≤ 0.05), but there was no significant difference between extender A and extender D (P > 0.05). At 120 h of preservation, the WOB of sperm preserved in extender A was the highest, but there was no significant difference compared with the other extenders (P > 0.05). At 144 h of preservation, the VCL, VAP, ALH and WOB of sperm preserved in extender A were the highest, and there were significant differences between extender A and extender B (P > 0.05). At 144 h of preservation, the LIN, STR and BCF of sperm preserved in extender A were the highest, but there was no significant difference between extender A and the other extenders (P > 0.05). The sperm MAD of extender A was significantly higher than those in other extenders (P < 0.05).

| Table 4. Effects of different extenders on the different kinematic parameters of preserved sperm (mean±SD) (continued...) |
| Kinematic Parameter | Storage Time | A | B | C | D | E (Control) |
|---------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| STR (%)             | 0 h          | 0.73±0.01ab | 0.78±0.05bc | 0.80±0.01b | 0.80±0.04a | 0.79±0.04bc |
|                     | 24 h         | 0.67±0.02a  | 0.59±0.01a  | 0.64±0.03a  | 0.67±0.01a | 0.49±0.29a  |
|                     | 48 h         | 0.66±0.02a  | 0.64±0.01a  | 0.42±0.24a  | 0.69±0.04a | 0.69±0.04a  |
|                     | 72 h         | 0.65±0.01ab | 0.79±0.06a  | -            | 0.77±0.00a | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 0.65±0.02a  | 0.76±0.05a  | -            | 0.60±0.05a | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 0.62±0.03a  | 0.79±0.02a  | -            | 0.42±0.13a | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 0.53±0.10a  | 0.46±0.41a  | -            | 0.28±0.06a | -            |
| BCF (Hz)            | 0 h          | 0.70±0.02ab | 0.72±0.02a  | 0.65±0.02a  | 0.67±0.02a | 0.69±0.04ab |
|                     | 24 h         | 0.72±0.03a  | 0.69±0.02a  | 1.20±0.73a  | 0.66±0.01a | 0.78±0.51a  |
|                     | 48 h         | 0.70±0.02a  | 0.67±0.02a  | 1.94±1.20a  | 0.78±0.02a | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 0.69±0.02a  | 0.68±0.06a  | -            | 0.82±0.07a | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 0.74±0.05a  | 0.78±0.05a  | -            | 0.78±0.14a | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 0.77±0.06a  | 1.89±1.65a  | -            | 1.20±0.70a | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 3.16±1.72a  | 1.69±1.47a  | -            | 1.17±0.50a | -            |
| MAD (°/s)           | 0 h          | 152.87±27.42a | 195.79±61.33a | 119.43±12.58a | 146.90±33.40a | 122.90±30.90a |
|                     | 24 h         | 183.35±73.24a | 128.03±16.13a | 13.36±5.55a  | 66.77±11.49a | 1.94±0.91a  |
|                     | 48 h         | 153.32±29.32 | 102.61±19.58 | 3.20±1.30a   | 19.17±6.20a | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 107.91±4.90a | 63.74±13.19a | -            | 18.63±2.49a | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 92.37±19.59a | 39.20±11.28a | -            | 13.14±2.11a | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 39.98±6.80a | 12.41±5.04a  | -            | 3.99±1.78a  | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 16.47±10.28a | 3.46±3.03a   | -            | 1.89±0.46a  | -            |
| WOB (%)             | 0 h          | 0.87±0.01ab | 0.83±0.05bc | 0.80±0.02ab | 0.79±0.03b | 0.83±0.05ab |
|                     | 24 h         | 0.94±0.02a  | 0.92±0.03a  | 0.86±0.04a  | 0.91±0.01a | 0.61±0.26a  |
|                     | 48 h         | 0.94±0.02a  | 0.92±0.03a  | 0.17±0.17a  | 0.88±0.02a | -            |
|                     | 72 h         | 0.92±0.02a  | 0.76±0.09a  | -            | 0.89±0.03a | -            |
|                     | 96 h         | 0.94±0.02a  | 0.79±0.07a  | -            | 0.94±0.07a | -            |
|                     | 120 h        | 0.95±0.04a  | 0.84±0.06a  | -            | 0.84±0.17a | -            |
|                     | 144 h        | 0.85±0.17a  | 0.53±0.48ab | -            | 0.17±0.17a | -            |

**Values within the same row with different letters differ significantly (P ≤ 0.05); - means that the sperm have all died, losing the significance of detection.**

The table shows the effects of different extenders on the different kinematic parameters of preserved sperm (mean ± SD). The parameters include STR, BCF, MAD, and WOB. The data are presented for various storage times: 0 h, 24 h, 48 h, 72 h, 96 h, 120 h, and 144 h. The different extenders are labeled A, B, C, D, and E (Control). The values are compared using letters (a-e) to indicate significant differences (P ≤ 0.05).
higher than those of the other four extenders within 24 to 144 h (P≤0.05).

**Effects of Different Extenders on the Sperm Survival Time**

As seen in Table 5, the effective and total survival times of semen preserved in extender A were the highest and were significantly higher than those of the other four extenders (P≤0.05).

**Effects of Different Extenders on the Sperm Plasma Membrane Integrity**

The effective survival time of sperm preserved by extender C was lower than that of the normal saline group; therefore, the detection of plasma membrane integrity was meaningless.

**Table 5. Effects of different extenders on the survival time of preserved sperm (mean±SD); h**

| Survival Time | A          | B          | C          | D          | E (Control) |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Effective survival time | 74.50±4.82a | 21.83±0.76b | 2.00±0.50c | 12.83±1.04d | 5.83±1.04e |
| Total survival time | 412.67±2.52a | 219.83±6.21b | 63.67±1.53c | 186.67±7.64c | 35.50±1.32e |

**Values within the same row with different letters differ significantly (P≤0.05)**

**Table 6. Effects of different extenders on the integrity of plasma membrane of preserved sperm (mean±SD); %**

| Storage Time | A          | B          | D          | E (Control) |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 0 h          | 61.82±1.61b | 62.44±1.24b | 63.12±1.69a | 65.65±1.02a |
| 24 h         | 56.38±4.99a | 54.80±3.97a | 40.18±2.79a | 21.13±3.76c |
| 48 h         | 55.45±3.99a | 51.25±2.81a | 35.84±5.69a | -           |
| 72 h         | 47.38±1.23a | 46.88±0.54a | 35.61±0.86a | -           |
| 96 h         | 45.35±1.58a | 42.23±2.41a | 32.23±1.94a | -           |
| 120 h        | 40.75±2.12a | 42.21±0.52a | 32.18±1.01a | -           |
| 144 h        | 34.00±4.00a | 37.67±3.40a | 26.89±0.44a | -           |

**Values within the same row with different letters differ significantly (P≤0.05); - means that the sperm have all died, losing the significance of detection.**

The effective survival time of sperm preserved by extender C was lower than that of the normal saline group, so the detection of plasma membrane integrity was meaningless.

Fig 1. Morphology of curly tail of sperm in HOST. Observation under 400x lens, the two types of tail curl A and B were intact plasma membrane sperm, and the tail non-curl type C was the sperm with damaged plasma membrane.
A, B and C, in which the two types of tail curl, A and B, represented intact plasma membrane sperm, and the tail non-curl type C represented sperm with damaged plasma membrane.

Effects of Different Extenders on Sperm Acrosome Integrity

The effective survival time of sperm preserved by extender C was lower than in the normal saline group; therefore, the detection of acrosome integrity was meaningless.

Table 7 shows that when Hu ram semen was preserved with four kinds of extenders at 16°C, the acrosome integrity of sperm decreased with the extension of storage time. Among them, the acrosome integrity of sperm preserved in extender A decreased steadily and slowly. At 24 h of preservation, the acrosome integrity of sperm preserved in extender A was the highest and was significantly higher than those in extender D and extender E (Control) (P≤0.05), but there was no significant difference between extender A and extender B (P>0.05). Within 48 to 96 h of preservation, the acrosome integrity of sperm preserved in extender A was higher than those of the other three extenders.

The results of microscopic examination after Coomassie brilliant blue staining are shown in Fig. 2. There were two types of sperm head: type A and type B. If the sperm head is blue, then the acrosome is intact (A). If the sperm head was unstained, it means the acrosome is not intact (B).

Discussion

In this study, total sperm motility, sperm progressive motility, effective survival time, total survival time, plasma membrane integrity, acrosome integrity and some kinematic parameters such as VSL, VCL and VAP were used to analyze the effects of different kinds of extenders on the preservation of Hu ram semen at 16°C. The results showed that the total sperm motility and progressive motility of extender A decreased steadily and slowly within 144 h of preservation of Hu ram semen at 16°C, and the performance of extender A was obviously better than those of the other extenders. The effective survival time, total survival time, plasma membrane integrity, acrosome integrity and motility performance of semen preserved in extender A were also significantly better than those of the other extenders. In short, extender A

**Table 7. Effects of different extenders on acrosome integrity of preserved sperm (mean±SD); %**

| Storage Time | A       | B       | D       | E (Control) |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|
| 0 h          | 96.45±1.78a | 94.62±2.67ab | 93.44±1.54ab | 92.53±2.37ab |
| 24 h         | 93.66±1.16a | 89.00±1.81ab | 83.47±3.40b  | 79.44±6.55c  |
| 48 h         | 93.00±1.43a | 88.08±2.79c  | 76.43±1.28c  | -            |
| 72 h         | 92.55±1.23a | 87.21±1.13c  | 70.01±4.05c  | -            |
| 96 h         | 92.50±0.79a | 85.48±0.71b  | 66.69±3.82c  | -            |
| 120 h        | 92.21±0.73a | 85.04±2.15c  | 64.47±3.70c  | -            |
| 144 h        | 90.93±1.88a | 84.43±1.07c  | 49.45±1.24c  | -            |

Values within the same row with different letters differ significantly (P≤0.05); - means that the sperm have all died, losing the significance of detection. The effective survival time of sperm preserved by extender C was lower than that of the normal saline group, so the detection of acrosome integrity was meaningless.
has the best effect on the preservation of Hu ram semen at 16°C.

At present, the extender preservation of ram semen has been studied in many aspects \cite{18}. At present, most of the studies on ram semen are 4°C preservation and cryopreservation, but there are a few reports on 16°C preservation. No matter which preservation method is used, the preservation quality of ram semen decreases gradually with time \cite{19}. It has been reported that the storage time of ram semen at 16°C is too short. Yaniz et al. \cite{20} indicated that the sperm progressive motility was less than 60% at 24 h in the ram semen preservation experiment at 16°C, which was far from meeting the production needs \cite{21}. Compared with 16°C preservation, the extender formula and operation process of semen 4°C preservation are more complex, which is not conducive to popularization and application, and 4°C preservation may have a certain impact on the sperm membrane \cite{22}. At the same time, 4°C preservation may also lead to the decrease of fertilization ability and an increased embryo loss rate \cite{23,24}.

At present, commercial extenders are used in the preservation of ram semen at 16°C, and there are few published reports on extender formulations. In the study of 4°C preservation of ram semen, Sarlos et al. \cite{25} used an extender composed of Tris, citric acid, glucose, yolk and antibacterial substances, and Kasimanickam et al. \cite{26} and Gundogan et al. \cite{27} used an extender composed of Tris, citric acid, fructose, yolk and antibacterial substances. In the study of cryopreservation of ram semen, Kumar et al. \cite{28} and Leahy et al. \cite{29} used a basic extender composed of Tris, citric acid, fructose, yolk and antibacterial substances, and Hamedani et al. \cite{30} and Merati et al. \cite{31} used extenders composed of Tris, citric acid, glucose, yolk, glycerol and antibacterial substances. In this experiment, various substances of extender A formula are used in Hu ram semen 4°C preservation and cryopreservation, and nutrients in previous formulations, such as glucose and fructose, are also used. Yolk and glycerol are added in the 4°C preservation and cryopreservation of ram semen. Yolk and glycerol are used as effective cryoprotectants. Additionally, yolk could also supply energy to sperm. Therefore, in experiments evaluating the preservation of Hu ram semen at 16°C, if yolk is not added, the amount of nutrients such as glucose or fructose should be increased.

The extender is composed of nutrients, buffers, antibiotics and other substances. The pH, osmotic pressure, buffering properties and functional substances of the extender will affect the preservation quality of semen \cite{12}. In this experiment, the sudden decreases of total motility and progressive motility of Hu ram sperm stored in extenders C and D at 16°C may have been due to the lack of substances to regulate and stabilize the pH in the extenders. In this experiment, the extender E (Control) was a 0.9% sodium chloride extender, and the sudden decline of total sperm motility during preservation may be due to the lack of nutrients in the extender, which cannot provide energy for sperm metabolism. In this experiment, the effective survival time of Hu ram sperm preserved in extender C at 16°C was lower than that in extender E (Control), normal saline, which may be due to the changes of the physical and chemical properties of the extender, which was not suitable for sperm survival. The total survival time of Hu ram sperm preserved in extender E (Control) at 16°C was lower than those with extender C and extender D, which may be because it did not contain nutrients and could not provide energy for sperm metabolism. The acrosome of sperm is an important organelle in the process of fertilization, and the survival time is proportional to the acrosome integrity \cite{33}. The acrosome integrity obtained in this experiment is proportional to the survival time, which is consistent with previous research results. VSL, VCL, VAP, ALH and BCF are single variables describing sperm velocity and are closely related to reproductive performance \cite{34}. Deyiliu showed that there is a significant relationship between ALH, BCF and semen quality \cite{35}. The VSL, VCL, VAP, ALH and WOB obtained in this experiment are proportional to sperm progressive motility, which is consistent with the results of previous studies. The MAD obtained in this experiment is proportional to sperm progressive motility, and there is no correlation between other kinematic parameters and sperm progressive motility.

In conclusion, the experimental results show that extender A is the best formula among the five extenders. At present, there are few extenders for Hu ram semen stored at 16°C. The storage time of the existing 16°C storage extender is too short. Although Tris extender is often used for cryopreservation, it has not been reported under 16°C storage conditions. In this experiment, the cryoprotective agent in the Tris extender during cryopreservation was removed. The formulation was optimized and was applied to 16°C storage, which greatly extended the survival time of sperm. The preparation process of extender is simple and easy to operate, which can meet the practical requirements of production and has good popularizing value.

**STATEMENT OF AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

LZ and YL: conceptualization. LZ, TS and CC: methodology. LZ and YW: software. YF: validation. LZ, YW and CC: formal analysis. LZ and JM: investigation. YL: resources. YW and YF: data curation. YL: supervision and validation. LZ: writing - original draft preparation. YL: writing - review and editing. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors thank all of the individuals who participated in this work.
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None of the authors have any conflict of interest to declare.