Celiac autoantibody positivity in relation to clinical characteristics in children with type 1 diabetes

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ABSTRACT

Background: Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disorder with a high risk of celiac disease (CD).

Aim: This study aimed to determine the celiac autoantibody status and the clinical characteristics among children with type 1 diabetes and autoantibody positivity for CD compared to those without serological evidence of CD.

Materials and Methods: In this cross-sectional study, 240 children with type 1 diabetes underwent serological screening CD. Blood glucose, glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), hemoglobin, calcium, phosphorous, Vitamin D, alanine aminotransferase (ALT), alkaline phosphatase (ALP), aspartate aminotransferase (AST), and gamma-glutamyl transferase (GGT) were evaluated. The participants were screened for human anti-endomysial antibody and human anti-tissue transglutaminase antibody.

Results: Of the 240 children with type 1 diabetes, 66 children were antibody positive for either anti-endomysial or anti-tissue transglutaminase or both autoantibodies for CD. There were 36 (54.5%) female and 30 (45.5%) male children with the mean age of 15.5±2.1 years. The mean duration of diabetes was 6.8±3.8 years. Only 35 (14.6%) children were found to have serological evidence of CD.

Conclusion: CD is associated with type 1 diabetes. Serological screening for CD autoantibody should be performed routinely in children with type 1 diabetes. There is discrepancy in screening CD with antibodies, so a prospective follow-up of this cohort is needed for endoscopic evaluation and histopathological examination of intestinal biopsy to confirm CD in this population.

Relevance for Patients: Anti-endomysial and anti-tissue transglutaminase autoantibodies should be included for screening CD among children with type 1 diabetes. Patients should undergo an endoscopy to confirm a diagnosis of CD.

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1. Introduction

Celiac disease (CD) is a chronic gluten-induced enteropathy. It is a rare gastrointestinal condition that affects children of any race, ethnicity, sex, and age [1]. In genetically predisposed persons, CD is activated and triggered by gluten present in barley, wheat, and rye. Type 1 diabetes and CD are common autoimmune diseases with common genetic and immunological features [2]. These features include the presence of the HLA-DQ-2 and HLA-DQ-8 genes associated with disease development and the presence of autoantibodies against tissue transglutaminase 2 (anti-tTG2) and endomysium. The prevalence of CD in the general population...
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2.1. Clinical and laboratory data

Demographic data were collected from patients’ files and information was extracted on the following symptoms: Abdominal pain, chronic diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, weight loss, chronic fatigue, bone pain, numbness/tingling in the extremities, and seizures. The participants were subsequently examined and information on weight, height, body mass index (BMI), and dental enamel defects were collected. Blood samples were obtained and centrifuged to collect serum on the day of diagnosis. Clinical and laboratory tests, including glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), hemoglobin, calcium, phosphorous, Vitamin D, alanine aminotransferase (ALT), aspartate aminotransferase (AST), gamma-glutamyl transferase (GGT), and alkaline phosphatase values, were evaluated by clinical biochemistry analyzer, Randox Daytona (Randox Laboratories, Crumlin, UK). The participants were tested for IgA (Catalog No. KA2110, Abnova, Taiwan). The participants were screened for human anti-endoymial antibody (EMA-IgA, Catalog No. E0781h, Wuhan Elabscience Co., China) and human anti-tissue transglutaminase antibody (tTG-IgA, Catalog No. E1830h, Wuhan Elabscience Co.) using an ELISA kit.

2.2. Statistical analysis

The results were reported as mean and standard deviation or as numbers and percentage. We compared different groups with CD-associated autoantibodies using Student’s t-test for continuous data and Chi-square test for categorical data. *P*≤0.05 was considered statistically significant. All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS 21 (IBM, Armonk, NY).

3. Results

Two hundred and forty children were included in the study. Mean age at diagnosis was 15.5 years; 106 (44.1%) were male and 134 (55.9%) children were female. The mean duration of diabetes was 7.4±4.2 years while the mean percentage of HbA1c at the time of diagnosis was 10.6±2.2.

Out of the 240 screened children with type 1 diabetes, 66 were seropositive for CD (either EMA, tTG-IgA, or both antibodies positivity). Their mean age at diagnosis was 15.5±2.1 years. There were 36 (54.5%) female and 30 (45.5%) male children and their mean duration of diabetes was 6.8±3.8 years. There was no significant difference in age, gender, and BMI between antibody-positive and antibody-negative participants (*p*>0.05). Laboratory parameters such as HbA1c, hemoglobin, calcium, phosphorous, Vitamin D, ALT, AST, GGT, and alkaline phosphatase did not differ between the groups (Table 1).

Sixty-six (27.5%) children were seropositive for either EMA, tTG-IgA, or both antibodies positive present at type 1 diabetes onset. The incident of multiple autoantibodies differed between the groups. Anti-endoymial positivity was a rare occurrence, appearing only in eight (3.3%) children. Conversely, anti-transglutaminase positivity was detected in 23 (9.6%) children. Only 35 (14.6%) children had serological evidence of CD and were found to be positive for both types of autoantibodies (Figure 1).

Table 2 demonstrates the clinical symptoms of type 1 diabetes children with CD. Sixty-six type 1 diabetes children were identified with CD. The clinical symptoms present in the celiac antibody group included diarrhea in 3 children (4.5%), chronic abdominal pain in 6 children (9.1%), fatigue in 20 children (30.3%), bone pain in 18 children (27.3%), seizure in 4 children (6.1%), dental discoloration and pitting in 10 children (15.2%), and numbness in 15 children (22.7%).

DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.18053/jctres.05.202003.001]
Sixty-six children who were seropositive for CD were divided into three groups: Anti-endomysial positive group, anti-transglutaminase positive group, and serological evidence of celiac disease group. There was no significant difference in age, height, weight, BMI, and diabetes duration among different groups when compare each group with without serological evidence of CD group. Laboratory parameters such as HbA1c, hemoglobin, calcium, phosphorus, Vitamin D, ALT, AST, GGT, and alkaline phosphatase also showed no significant changes in different groups (Table 3).

### 4. Discussion

The prevalence of Cd is quite high among Saudi children with type 1 diabetes (27.5%). We found that children with type 1 diabetes had higher occurrence of anti-TTG and anti-EMA antibodies (14.6%). On its own, anti-EMA antibody was rarely detected (3.3%), whereas some children were positive for anti-tTG antibodies (9.6%). The actual prevalence of CD is inappropriate to estimate because type 1 diabetes children may have atypical symptoms or none [10]. An earlier study reported that more than half of the Saudi pediatric population carries HLA-DQ genotypes that confer a higher risk of developing CD [11]. The prevalence of CD is high among patients with type 1 diabetes and may vary from 3 to 12% [1]. The prevalence rate reported in this study is also high and could be associated with genetic and environmental factors predisposing children to the development of CD. This study identified CD using two highly sensitive and specific antibodies, namely, anti-tTG and anti-EMA. Type 1 diabetic children may have false-positive anti-tTG low values, so the determination of lower

**Table 1.** Clinical and serological data of type 1 diabetic children with celiac disease.

| Variables                  | Total subjects (n=240) | Antibody negative (n=174) | Antibody positive (n=66) | P-value |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| Age (years)                | 15.5±2.5               | 15.6±2.6                  | 15.5±2.1                 | 0.871   |
| Sex (M/F) (n)              | (106/134)              | (76/98)                   | (30/36)                  | 0.805   |
| Duration of diabetes (Y)   | 7.4±4.2                | 7.6±4.3                   | 6.8±3.8                  | 0.184   |
| Height (cm)                | 158.0±22.3             | 157.9±25.3                | 158.0±10.8               | 0.984   |
| Weight (kg)                | 55.2±13.7              | 55.2±14.0                 | 55.2±12.9                | 0.981   |
| BMI (kg/m²)                | 22.3±4.2               | 22.4±4.4                  | 21.9±3.7                 | 0.455   |
| HbA1c (%)                  | 10.6±2.2               | 10.6±2.3                  | 10.7±2.0                 | 0.751   |
| Calcium (nmol/L)           | 2.3±0.09               | 2.31±0.09                 | 2.31±0.08                | 0.575   |
| Vitamin D (ng/mL)          | 33.1±16.6              | 33.6±16.0                 | 31.8±18.3                | 0.513   |
| Hemoglobin (g/L)           | 137.2±12.9             | 137.6±12.4                | 136.3±14.4               | 0.486   |
| Phosphorus (nmol/L)        | 1.3±0.2                | 1.30±0.24                 | 1.30±0.23                | 0.783   |
| ALT (U/L)                  | 18.6±23.8              | 18.1±23.6                 | 19.9±24.5                | 0.609   |
| AST (U/L)                  | 22.0±27.44             | 20.9±19.8                 | 25.0±41.4                | 0.309   |
| ALP (U/L)                  | 191.2±113.0            | 186.8±113.0               | 202.9±113.2              | 0.325   |
| GGT (U/L)                  | 16.8±13.0              | 17.0±14.9                 | 16.8±12.3                | 0.918   |
| IgA (ng/mL)                | 5.9±3.9                | 5.5±3.9                   | 7.3±3.7                  | 0.687   |

Data are expressed as mean±SD. Abbreviations: BMI: Body mass index, HbA1c: Hemoglobin A1c; AST: Aspartate aminotransferase, ALT: Alanine amino transferase, ALP: Alkaline phosphatase; GGT: Gamma-glutamyl transferase, IgA: Immunoglobulin A. P≤0.05 is statistically significant

**Table 2.** Clinical symptoms of type 1 diabetic children with celiac disease.

| Symptoms among CD patients | Antibody-negative group (n=174) (%) | Antibody-positive group (n=66) (%) | P-value |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Diarrhea (yes)             | 8 (4.6)                            | 3 (4.5)                           | 0.986   |
| Chronic abdominal pain (yes)| 20 (11.5)                          | 6 (9.1)                           | 0.593   |
| Fatigue (yes)              | 54 (31.0)                          | 20 (30.3)                         | 0.913   |
| Bone pain (yes)            | 48 (27.6)                          | 18 (27.3)                         | 0.961   |
| Seizure (yes)              | 8 (4.6)                            | 4 (6.1)                           | 0.642   |
| Dental (brown discoloration, pitting (yes) | 46 (26.4) | 10 (15.2) | 0.065 |
| Numbness (yes)             | 46 (26.4)                          | 15 (22.7)                         | 0.556   |

Data are expressed as n (%). P≤0.05 is statistically significant

**Figure 1.** Serological data of type 1 diabetic children with celiac disease.
positive cutoff value of anti-tTG may help in differentiating unusual variants [8]. In our study, 66 patients had autoantibody positivity and only 35 patients had serological evidence of both anti-tTG and anti-EMA positivity and had discrepant findings. There was a large discrepancy observed between the serological tests performed. To address this discrepancy, prospective follow-up of this cohort in children is needed for endoscopic evaluation and histopathological examination of intestinal biopsy to confirm CD.

Consequences of CD produces an improper T-cell-mediated immune response against ingested gluten in genetically predisposed children. Children with CD show an increased expression of HLA-DQ (α*501, β*02) heterodimer (HLA-DQ2) gene. When gluten is present, it triggers gliadin peptides present on the antigen-presenting cells to trigger intestinal mucosal T-cells. The tissue transglutaminase enzyme is one of the important targets of the autoimmune response in CD. The α-gliadin peptide neutral amino acid glutamine undergoes modification by host tissue transglutaminase to form negatively charged glutamic acids residues in α-gliadin peptide, which preferentially has a specific role in enhancing the α-gliadin T-cell response as well as the sensitized lymphocytes in the lamina propria [9].

Serological and histopathological examination of intestinal biopsy to confirm the seropositive CD diagnosis was not performed. Third, serological measurement of antibodies was measured at a single time point. The authors would like to acknowledge the members of University Diabetes Center, King Abdulaziz University Hospital, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, for helping in patients recruitment for this study, and the National Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation (MAARIFAH), King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, grant to the Strategic Center for Diabetes Research, the College of Medicine, King Saud University.

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