INFLUENCE OF C₆₀ FULLERENE ON THE ISCHEMIA-REPERFUSION INJURY IN THE SKELETAL MUSCLE OF RAT LIMB: MECHANOKINETIC AND BIOCHEMICAL ANALYSIS

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Influence of the pristine C₆₀ fullerene aqueous colloidal solution (C₆₀ FAS) on the ischemia-reperfusion injury in the skeletal muscle of rat limb was studied. Skeletal muscle damage effects were induced by 3 h lasting vascular ischemia. The impact of C₆₀ FAS was studied after its intramuscular injection immediately after 1 h of reperfusion at different doses, namely: 1, 2 and 3 mg/kg of body weight. Changes in the mechanokinetic parameters of ischemic skeletal muscle contraction at different modes of functioning and biochemical parameters of blood were used as markers of ischemic injury, and analyzed in detail under action of C₆₀ FAS. The obtained results indicate on great promise of use of C₆₀ FAS to reduce the consequences of ischemic muscle trauma.

Key words: C₆₀ fullerene, skeletal muscle, ischemia-reperfusion injury, mechanokinetic and biochemical analysis.

Ischemic injuries constitute more than 35% among various injury-induced pathologies that develop in skeletal muscles [1]. They are a major cause of postoperative complications, and can lead to amputations of limbs and even mortality after acute arterial occlusion [2]. Effects of skeletal muscle ischemia depend on the degree of microvasculature damage, level of tissue hypoxia, amount and value of the products of metabolism, ratio of extracellular and intracellular concentrations of Na⁺, K⁺, H⁺, mechanical damage to muscles, etc. [2, 3]. Free radicals that are rapidly formed in ischemic muscle injury, are another major threat to the organism of ischemic patients [4]. Interaction of hydroxyl radical with hydrogen atoms of methyl groups of polyunsaturated fatty acids is considered one of the major mechanisms of tissue damage by free radicals. This process initiates lipid peroxidation (LPO) in plasma membrane, which in turn leads to increased permeability of cell membranes. In this regard, use of antioxidants is considered promising direction in the treatment of muscle damage [4-7].

Some nanomaterials show strong antioxidant properties and can be used for the treatment of ischemia injury of different organs [8]. So, C₆₀ fullerenes behave as “free radical scavengers” and demonstrate antioxidant activity in micromolar concentrations, eliminating both H₂O₂ and superoxide anions [9, 10]. Due to its nearly spherical shape and nanosize, water-soluble C₆₀ fullerene is capable to penetrate plasma membrane of mammalian cells [11-13]. In vitro and in vivo studies of water-soluble pristine C₆₀ fullerenes had found that these compounds do not possess acute toxicity towards cells and tissues of human organism [14-17]. Thus, the main advantage of use of C₆₀ fullerenes as powerful anti-
oxidents is their ability to rapidly accumulate inside the cells in the mitochondria and other organelles, responsible for generation of toxic free radicals under pathological conditions [11, 18, 19].

Thus, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of water-soluble pristine C$_{60}$ fullerenes on the mechanokinetic and biochemical parameters of rat soleus muscle functioning at the ischemia-reperfusion injury.

**Materials and Methods**

A highly stable pristine C$_{60}$ fullerene aqueous colloidal solution (C$_{60}$FAS) was prepared according to protocol [20, 21]. The final concentration of C$_{60}$ fullerenes in the prepared C$_{60}$FAS sample was 0.15 mg/ml.

The state of C$_{60}$ fullerene particles (aggregation) in aqueous solution was monitored using atomic force microscopy (AFM; NT-MDT, Russia). The samples were deposited by precipitation from C$_{60}$FAS droplet onto a cleaved mica surface. Measurements were performed after complete evaporation of the solvent. The sample visualization was performed in semi-contact (tapping) mode.

The study was conducted on white male rats of the Wistar line weighing $170 \pm 5$ g. The animals were kept under standard conditions in the vivarium of the ESC Institute of Biology and Medicine, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Animals had free access to food and water. All experiments were conducted in accordance with the international principles of the European Convention for protection of vertebrate animals under a control of the Bio-Ethics Committee of the abovementioned institution.

All experimental animals were divided into five groups: intact group ($n = 10$), control group (animals after ischemia without injection of C$_{60}$FAS; $n = 10$), and three experimental groups: animals after ischemia with different doses of C$_{60}$FAS intramuscular injection immediately after reperfusion – 1 mg/kg ($n = 10$), 2 mg/kg ($n = 10$), and 3 mg/kg ($n = 10$).

Under severe anesthesia (ketamine: 100 mg/kg, Pfizer, USA), the animals were tracheotomized and connected to the lung ventilator. Musculus soleus was isolated in the area of the popliteal hollow, cut proximally and attached to the force sensors. The animal then was fixed in a stereotactic machine with a system of rigid fixation of the head, pelvis and extremities. The innervating musculus soleus nerve was fixed on a bipolar platinum wire electrode for further electrical stimulation. The edges of the skin on the hind limbs around the incision were sewn to the machine armature, and basins with muscle and nerve that were formed, were filled with vaseline oil. During the operation and the experiment by itself, the heart rate was monitored.

In order to get muscle ischemia, the branch of the femoral artery, which provided blood to the experimental muscle for 3 h, was ligated.

Before stimulation of the ventral roots of the spinal cord, the muscle was attached to an external load that could not stretch it due to a one-sided mechanical limiter that allowed only a muscle shortening.

The force of the skeletal muscle contraction was measured with the usage of unique strain gauges in 1 h after ischemia-reperfusion. Programmable signal generators of a special form were used to generate stimulating signals. The contraction of muscles was induced by the stimulation of the nervus ischiadicus. The electric pulses were 2 ms duration, formed by a pulse generator. Control of the external load on the muscle was carried out with the help of the original system of mechanical stimulators [22].

As muscle contraction markers, the time of reducing the maximum contraction force to 25% and 50% levels were measured. As a marker of quantitative changes in muscle activity, the integrated muscle power was calculated (the total area under the force curve). The force response of musculus soleus in the control group was accepted as 100%.

The content of creatinine, creatine phosphokinase (CPK) and lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) enzymes in the blood of experimental animals, as the markers of ischemic injury of the skeletal muscle, was determined using the standard clinical equipment (Selectra Pro XL EliTechGroup, France).

The mechanokinetic and biochemical data are expressed as the mean±SD for each group. The differences among experimental groups were detected by one-way ANOVA followed by Bonferroni’s multiple comparison test. Values of $P < 0.05$ were considered significant.

**Results and Discussion**

_AFM measurements._ It is established that the size of C$_{60}$ fullerene aggregates in aqueous solution strongly correlates with their biological properties. Thus, the apoptosis in macrophages induced by aqueous C$_{60}$ fullerene aggregates, leads to changes in the mitochondrial membrane potential [23], the aggregated forms of C$_{60}$ fullerene may effectively
bind to biopolymers [24], and antibacterial activity of C$_{60}$ fullerene is tightly connected with its ability to undergo aggregation [25]. Depending on the size C$_{60}$ fullerene particles can penetrate through plasma membrane inside the cell through endocytosis or passive diffusion [11, 13, 26, 27] or be adsorbed on the surface of the membrane [12]. Therefore, the size of C$_{60}$ fullerene particles in aqueous solution has a major influence on their biological properties.

Fig. 1 shows the AFM image of surface area covered by C$_{60}$ fullerenes (~0.7 nm) and their aggregates with size up to 100 nm. Thus, C$_{60}$FAS is a polydisperse colloidal nanosystem. This result is in a good agreement with our previous probe microscopic data which directly correlate with C$_{60}$ fullerene bioactivity [28, 29].

Mechanokinetic analysis. One of the main parameters of muscle pathology development is measurement of the force myotonic response. The contractile dynamics of the muscle is determined by specific mechanisms of motoneuronic pools interaction and activation of actin and myosin myofilaments interaction. Changes in the elastic properties of muscle fibers, tendon elements and connective tissue determine the force response of contractive elastic component, which is a consequence of pathological process development.

Several basic biomechanical parameters were investigated during analysis of musculus soleus myotonic response by using the frequency-modulated stimulating signal. These parameters are universally recognizable markers for the presence of particular link dysfunctions in the “stimulation-response” chain as a neuromuscular drug, as well as the general state of the organism.

Determination of the muscle contraction force generation level. This marker is a general indicator of the reduction (during the pathology development) of the maximum possible force response. Its change can be related either to a violation in the neuronal component, or to the myotic components of the pathology that is studied.

Determination of the muscle contraction integrated power. The integrated power (calculated area that is bounded by the force curve: $S = \int F dt$, $F = \frac{P t}{l}$, where $P$ is a muscle power, and $l = \text{const}$ is its length) is an indicator of the overall capacity of the muscle during application of the stimulation pools. Its analysis allows assessing the level of muscle activity formation in the “force-external load” equilibrium system that is a physiological analogue of the working capacity of the muscular system in general.

Determination of the temporal characteristics of muscle contraction in the examined pathology development. Evaluation of muscle contraction...
development was carried out by calculating time indexes (time of achievement and retention of the attained state of the contractile process) when 25 and 50% of force levels responses were obtained after stimulation.

The curves of contraction forces generation (Fig. 2), the value of the achievement time by the force of 25 and 50% of its initial level (Fig. 3) and the relative value of the integrated power (Fig. 4) of ischemic musculus soleus as a response to stimulation at frequencies of 1 and 2 Hz clearly show a tendency to reduce the maximal force response, the time of achievement by contraction force its 25 and 50% levels and integrated power of the active muscle throughout the experiment compared to norm (the intact group; data not shown). It should be noted that the maximum changes of the muscles force response occur in the first minutes of force parameters registration (Fig. 2).

After 150 s of muscle activation the force response does not exceed 18% and 12% of the initial parameters at the frequency of 1 and 2 Hz, respectively. The time to reach 25% and 50% level of the initial force was 127 and 145 s with the frequency of

![Fig. 2. Curves of ischemic musculus soleus force contraction generation during stimulation with 1 and 2 Hz frequencies and 180 s duration: a – ischemic muscle contraction without injection of C6FAS (control); b, c and d – ischemic muscle contraction after intramuscular injection of 1, 2 and 3 mg/kg C6FAS, respectively]
stimulation 1 Hz and 51 and 123 s with the frequency of stimulation 2 Hz (Fig. 3, a). The data show the presence of severe pathological changes in muscle dynamics associated with ischemic dysfunction of muscle tissue.

In the case of a muscle force response study, the protective effect of C_{60}FAS strongly manifested itself with an increase in the dose of injection (Fig. 2, b, c, d) compared to control (Fig. 2, a). The time to reach 25% and 50% of primary force with the C_{60}FAS application in a dose of 1 mg/kg was 162 and 187 s with the stimulation frequency of 1 Hz and 89 and 168 s with the stimulation frequency of 2 Hz (Fig. 3, b). Increasing the dosage of C_{60}FAS in 2-3 times (2-3 mg/kg) increased the time to achieve a 50% force level only by 5-6% when the stimulation was 1 Hz and 6-8% during stimulation of 2 Hz compared to dose of 1 mg/kg (Fig. 3, c, d). Thus, the C_{60}FAS dose of 1 mg/kg revealed an optimal ratio of “dose-effect”.

The magnitude of the integrated power in the case of using 1 mg/kg C_{60}FAS increased by 16% during stimulation at 1 Hz frequency and by 21% during stimulation at 2 Hz frequency compared to the control (Fig. 4). Increasing the dose of C_{60}FAS in 2-3 times increases the integrated power by 16-22% with stimulation at 1 Hz frequency and by 25-31% during stimulation at 2 Hz frequency compared to the 1 mg/kg dose of C_{60}FAS. It should also be mentioned that the difference in the studied parameter in the case of 2 and 3 mg/kg C FAS doses is insignificant amongst themselves (within the limits of statistical error; Fig. 4).
While studying the muscle contractile properties, it is important not only to know the current values of the force response and the intensity of muscle activation, but also their temporal dynamics. A consequence of the neuromuscular complex development dysfunction is the necessity for motoneurons to generate the sufficiently powerful dynamic stimulation components to resume the error-free functioning of the muscular system. Thus, at the same levels of the efferent command, not only does an increase of the preceding dynamic component duration slow down the transition to a new equilibrium force, but also leads to a decrease in the maximum force response. A series of 10 consecutive stimulations of an ischemic damaged muscle with duration 6 s, 50 Hz frequency and 5 min relaxation was used to reveal such effect on the studied areas of the dynamic process (Fig. 5).

As it could be seen from Fig. 4, a, the contraction force in ischemic muscles at the first stimulation pool decreased to 50% relatively to the norm (intact group) and decreased to 11% to the 10th contractile act. The protective effect of C₆₀FAS was observed even at the minimum applied dose of the

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**Fig. 5.** Curves of ischemic musculus soleus tetanic force contraction generation caused by 10 successive 50 Hz stimuli with duration of 6 s and 5 min relaxation: a – ischemic muscle contraction without injection of C₆₀FAS (control); b, c and d – ischemic muscle contraction after intramuscular injection of 1, 2 and 3 mg/kg C₆₀FAS, respectively; norm – muscle contraction in the intact group; Δ𝑡₁ and Δ𝑡₂ – time of reaching and maintaining the maximum level of muscle contraction
drug – 1 mg/kg (Fig. 5, b). The maximum force response relatively to the norm at the 10th contraction increased by 55% at C60FAS dose of 1 mg/kg and by 83 and 87% at C60FAS doses of 2 and 3 mg/kg, respectively (Fig. 5, b, c, d). The increase in integrated muscle power in the application of C60FAS was similar: by 48% at the 10th contraction at 1 mg/kg C60FAS dose and by 77 and 80% at 2 and 3 mg/kg C60FAS dose, respectively.

As in the previous experiments, significant dose dependence was observed only between 1 and 2 mg/kg C60FAS doses: an increase of C60FAS dose from 2 to 3 mg/kg resulted in a slight improvement in muscle contraction parameters that did not exceed 10%.

The previously discovered high correlation between the duration of ischemia and the viability of muscle fiber [30], could be one of the main factors for reducing the maximum force response, not only because of the decrease in viable muscle fibers, but also due to an increase in muscle stiffness because of the increase in collagen structures in it. During ischemia lasting for 3 h both necrotic muscular changes and nervous degeneration are observed, and the amount of necrosis in the muscle tissue can reach up to 60% [31]. Thus, the use of C60FAS in ischemic injury may have a pronounced positive normalizing effect, mainly at an early stage of development of such pathology (~1-2 h).

**Biochemical analysis.** At the biochemical level, ischemic damage of the muscle tissue is a sequence of biochemical reactions initiated by hypoxia after several minutes of ischemia, which, regardless of etiological features, is the result of insufficient blood muscle supply [1]. The death of the majority of cells occurs due to the activation of chemicals produced during and after ischemia and can continue for several days even after the restoration of normal blood flow. Today, it is known that after 2 h of skeletal muscle ischemia and subsequent reperfusion, the concentration of ATP is significantly reduced at the same time with a significant increase in the amount of lactate – from 25 to 114 mmol/kg of dry weight. After 3 h of ischemia, the intramuscular pool of ATP is about 5% of the baseline level, while the glycogen pool is exhausted by 88% [34]. From the functional point of view, these values indicate that a significant amount of high-energy phosphate compounds is consumed by the damaged ischemic-muscle cell for the homeostasis support, especially during the first hour of ischemia. As a result, metabolic disorders lead to a dramatic increase in fatigue of ischemic muscle.

Besides the danger caused by the release of the above-mentioned macromolecules to the ischemic muscle tissue and the entire body, free radicals that are intensively formed by ischemic injury, possess even higher threat to the organism. Free radicals, in particular superoxide anions and hydroxyl radicals, are the main pathogenic factors in the process of ischemic-reperfusion damage of muscle tissue. They initiate the LPO and direct inhibition of mitochondrial enzymes in the respiratory chain, inhibit the ATPase activity, inactivate the glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase, sodium channels in cell membrane and launch a number of other pathophysiological processes. All this indicates on the extremely high risk of reperfusion damage to the skeletal muscle. Thus, it is not surprising that reperfusion injury, observed after acute arterial occlusion, is the cause of the most severe pathologies and even mortality [2]. Therefore, the use of biocompatible water-soluble C60 fullerenes, which have powerful antioxidant properties [35, 36] may be extremely promising for treatment of various pathologies, connected to oxidative stress [4-8, 37, 38]. It is important to note that C60 fullerenes reduce the production of reactive oxygen species in muscle tissue, which is confirmed by physical (EPR spectroscopy and spin traps) and biochemical methods [4, 5, 7, 8].

All of the above-analyzed factors allow us to consider ischemic-reperfusion injury as a complex pathophysiological process that affects a large number of metabolic links directly at the place of pathology development, and generally in the body. For evaluation of ischemic-reperfusion injury, several markers were selected which are specific for muscle damage and can be measured by standard blood biochemical assays – creatinine, CPK and LDH enzymes.

Creatinine is a breakdown product of creatine phosphate, that serves as a rapidly mobilizable reserve of high-energy phosphates in skeletal muscle. During ischemic-reperfusion skeletal muscle injury creatinine is released from damaged muscle tissue to the blood, while its elimination by the kidneys is decreased due to renal insufficiency. 3-fold increase in creatinine level after 3 h of muscle ischemia in comparison with the intact group (norm; Fig. 6) indicates the presence of severe mechanical destruction of muscle fibers in the experimental limb. Reduction of this index by 18, 40 and 47% after injection of
animals with 1, 2 and 3 mg/kg of the C₆₀FAS doses clearly demonstrates its protective effect (Fig. 6).

CPK is the enzyme that catalyzes the transfer of a phosphate group from ATP to a creatine molecule that results in a high-energy creatine phosphate compound formation that is used with the body as an energy substance during increased physical activity. When muscles are damaged, release of this enzyme from the cells into the blood is observed. In our opinion, a 2-fold increase of the CPK fraction after 3 h of muscle ischemia (norm; Fig. 6) is the result of pathological destruction of the myocyte walls with partial release of intramyocytic enzymes in the extracellular space, while the decrease in the CPK concentration by 20-35% is due to the normalizing effect of C₆₀FAS (Fig. 6).

LDH is a zinc intracellular enzyme that catalyzes the oxidation of lactic acid (the final product of glucose metabolism in cells in the absence of oxygen, for example, during prolonged physical activity) to pyruvate with the formation of NADH and is present in almost all cells of the body. In diseases that are accompanied by tissue damage and cell destruction, LDH activity in the blood increases. In conducted studies, LDH level increased after 3 h of musculus soleus ischemic damage 1.5 fold compared to the intact group (norm; Fig. 6), which is consistent with the literature data [30, 31]. On the contrary, C₆₀FAS efficiently inhibited LDH release in dose-dependent manner – by 15% after 1 mg/kg dose and 25% after 3 mg/kg dose (Fig. 6).

Thus, changes in the examined biochemical markers of ischemia for different injected doses of C₆₀FAS indicate on its overall positive normalizing effect, in contrast to the mechanokinetic parameters, when the optimal positive changes were observed already at the 1 mg/kg C₆₀FAS dose and varied by 10% level after each subsequent increase in C₆₀FAS concentration.

Despite development of novel experimental approaches for analysis of the neuromuscular regulation at the microlevel, there is still no alternative to traditional electrophysiological models using neuromuscular preparations *in vivo*. Such studies should be conducted with the aim of simultaneous monitoring of various biomechanical parameters with different amplitude-time intervals and a labile system of external stimulation. In the framework of such approach, it was established that the therapeutic C₆₀FAS injection can significantly reduce the negative pathological changes in the mechanokinetic parameters of the skeletal muscle functioning after 3 h of ischemia and 1 h of reperfusion. Positive therapeutic changes were recorded for both tetanic and single muscle contractions. For ischemic-reperfusion injury, a significant increase of creatinine, CPK and LDH in blood was observed, while the injection of C₆₀FAS significantly reduced these markers of ischemia.
ischemic injury. However, further 2-3-fold increase of C₆₀FAS dose led to a little increase of its efficiency, which can be explained by the property of C₆₀ fullerenes to aggregate in the aqueous medium \cite{39, 40}. This can lead to potential decrease of their biological activity \cite{23, 25}, thus we consider that the optimal C₆₀FAS dosage is 1 mg/kg of animal weight.

Consequently, taking into account the pronounced antioxidant properties of water-soluble C₆₀ fullerenes and the lack of data about their acute and chronic toxicity, their use in therapy of ischemic-reperfusion damage of muscle tissue opens up new possibilities in modern nanomedicine.

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ВПЛИВ ФУЛЬРЕНУ C₆₀ НА ІШЕМІЧНО-РЕЛЕРФУЗІЙНУ ТРАВМУ СКЕЛЕТНОГО М’ЯЗА КІНЦІВКИ ЩУРА: МЕХАНОКІНЕТИЧНИЙ ТА БІОХІМІЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗИ

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Вивчено вплив водно-колоїдного розчину фуллерену C₆₀ (C₆₀FAS) на ішемично-реперфузійну травму скелетного м’яза задньої кінцівки щура. Ушкодження скелетного м’яза були спричинені васкулярно ішемізацією тривалістю 3 год. Вплив C₆₀FAS вивчали шляхом його внутрішньом’язової ін’єкції після 1 год реперфузії за різних доз введення: 1, 2 і 3 мг/кг маси тіла тварини. Як маркери ішемічного ушкодження м’язів було використано зміни механокінетичних параметрів скорочення ішемізованого скелетного м’яза за різних режимів функціонування та біохімічні параметри крові тварин, які було детально досліджено за дії C₆₀FAS. Одержані результати вказують на перспективність використання C₆₀FAS для зменшення наслідків ішемічної травми м’яза.

Ключові слова: фуллерен C₆₀, скелетний м’яз, ішемично-реперфузійна травма, механокінетичний та біохімічний аналіз.

ВЛИЯНИЕ ФУЛЛЕРЕНА C₆₀ НА ИШЕМИЧЕСКУ-РЕПЕРФУЗИОННУЮ ТРАВМУ СКЕЛЕТНОЙ МЫШЦЫ КОНЕЧНОСТИ КРЫСЫ: МЕХАНОКИНЕТИЧЕСКИЙ И БИОХИМИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Изучено влияние водно-коллоидного раствора фуллерена C₆₀ (C₆₀FAS) на ишемико-реперфузционную травму скелетной мыши задней конечности крысы. Повреждения скелетной мыши были вызваны васкулярной ишемией длительностью 3 ч. Влияние C₆₀FAS изучали после его внутримышечной инъекции по истечении 1 ч реперфузии при разных дозах введения: 1, 2 и 3 мг/кг массы тела животного. В качестве маркеров ишемического повреждения были использованы механокинетические параметры скорочения ишемизированной скелетной мыши при различных режимах функционирования и биохимические параметры кро-
Последствий ишемической травмы мышцы. Полученные результаты указывают на перспективность использования C<sub>60</sub>FAS для снижения последствий ишемической травмы мышцы.

Ключевые слова: фуллерен C<sub>60</sub>, скелетная мышца, ишемически-реперфузионная травма, механокинетический и биохимический анализ.

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