A rapid simplified method for plasma 25-hydroxyvitamin D estimation

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Low plasma 25-hydroxyvitamin D (25-OHD) concentrations are common in elderly people, orthopaedic patients, Asian immigrants, and in the later stages of pregnancy. Though a low plasma 25-OHD concentration is not always associated with osteomalacia, there is circumstantial evidence that, in old people at least, low 25-OHD levels if left untreated may ultimately lead to metabolic bone disease. A case might be made for screening for vitamin D deficiency by measuring plasma 25-OHD concentrations. If this were to be practicable, however, the assay technique would need to be simple and rapid. Previously developed competitive protein-binding assays for 25-OHD are tedious, involving long extraction procedures and chromatographic purifications. This paper describes a simpler technique developed by modifying a method by Belsey et al.

Material and methods

STEROIDS

Standard 25-hydroxycholecalciferol (25-OHD₃) was obtained from the Upjohn Company by courtesy of Dr John Babcock and 25-hydroxy (26(27)-methyl-³H) cholecalciferol (³H₂5-OHD₃), 12-2 Ci/mmoll, was purchased from the Radiochemical Centre, Amersham, Bucks, UK.

BUFFER

Barbital acetate buffer was prepared by mixing 0.486 g sodium acetate, 0.787 g barbitone sodium, and 7.65 g sodium chloride in 1 litre of water and adjusting the pH to 8.6 with hydrochloric acid. In order to facilitate solubilisation of steroids, β lipoprotein was added to the buffer. A precipitate of this, obtained by the technique of Besley et al., was washed with ether and then reconstituted to the original volume with barbital acetate buffer. This was added to more buffer at a suitable dilution which maintained non-specific binding at a minimum (1:800).

BINDING PROTEIN

Serum from weanling rats raised on a vitamin D deficient diet for at least three weeks was stored at −20°C. Before use in the assay this was diluted with buffer to a concentration that gave approximately 50% binding of ³H₂5-OHD₃.

DEXTRAN-COATED CHARCOAL

0.5 g dextran (molecular weight 60 000-90 000) and 5.0 g Norit-GSX charcoal were mixed with 200 ml barbital acetate buffer. This was further diluted with buffer (1:10) before use.

SCINTILLATION FLUID

A mixture of toluene and triton X-100 (2:1) was added to 1,4-bis-(5-phenyloxazol-2-yl) benzene and 2,5-diphenyloxazole to give 0.03% and 0.5% solutions respectively.

METHOD

A 200 µl plasma sample was thoroughly mixed with 0.8 ml ethanol and left at 4°C for 30 minutes. On centrifugation 50 µl was transferred to a glass assay tube. Another 50 µl was added to a control tube to monitor non-specific binding. 50 µl aliquots of each of the standards serially diluted in ethanol were transferred to assay tubes. 50 µl ³H₂5-OHD₃ (0.34 pmol), also prepared in ethanol, was added to all tubes, followed by 1 ml barbital acetate buffer, containing 25-OHD binding protein, to the assay tubes and 1 ml buffer alone to the control tubes. After mixing, these were left for 2 hours at 4°C. Unbound steroids were removed using dextran-coated charcoal (500 µl) and, after centrifugation, the supernatants were decanted into vials containing 10 ml of scintillation fluid. The radioactivity was counted in a Packard β-counter. Percentage binding of ³H₂5-OHD₃ was calculated from:

Counts from assay tube—counts from control tube.

Total counts added

From this a standard curve was obtained by plotting the percentage of bound ³H₂5-OHD₃ against log mass of 25-OHD₃ (Fig. 1). 25-OHD concentrations (nmol/l) in individual plasma samples could then be obtained by reference to the standard curve (2.5 nmol/l is equivalent to 1 ng/ml).

Results

STANDARD CURVE

The standard curve obtained is shown in Fig. 1 and covers the workable range. The sensitivity of the assay system is 5 nmol/l, as defined by Ekins.

PRECISION

The intra-assay coefficients of variation for 10 samples containing 30 nmol/l and 10 samples...
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containing 105 nmol/l 25-OHD were 2% and 8% respectively. The inter-assay coefficient of variation for 24 samples containing 30 nmol/l was 10%; that for 30 samples containing 105 nmol/l was 16%.

ACCURACY
Recovery of \(^{3}\text{H}\) 25-OHD\(_{3}\) added to five plasma samples was 97 ± 3%. A linear regression calculated for estimated 25-OHD against added 25-OHD\(_{3}\) gave a correlation coefficient of 0.98.

SPECIFICITY
Cross-reactivity with different steroids at 50% displacement from zero binding is shown in the Table. Only 25-hydroxyergocalciferol (25-OHD\(_{2}\)) and 24,25-dihydroxycholecalciferol (24,25-(OH)\(_{2}\)D\(_{3}\)) caused significant interference.

Cross-reactivity of steroids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steroid</th>
<th>% Cross-reaction (at 50% inhibition of binding)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-hydroxycholecalciferol</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-hydroxyergocalciferol</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24,25-dihydroxycholecalciferol</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,25-dihydroxycholecalciferol</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholecalciferol</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ergocalciferol</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholic acid</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cortisol</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 (\beta)-oestradiol</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androsterone</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1 Standard curve for 25-OHD obtained by plotting % of bound \(^{3}\text{H}\) 25-OHD\(_{3}\) to binding protein against the increasing amounts of 25-OHD\(_{3}\) added. Mean values ± SD of four assays are indicated.

Fig. 2 Distribution of plasma 25-OHD concentrations in healthy young adults.
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The concentrations of 25-OHD in young adults estimated by the technique are comparable with those found by workers using other methods where mean values are 68 nmol/l, 77 nmol/l, and 98 nmol/l. Studies utilising the technique have included a review of 62 patients admitted to a geriatric unit, assessments of the responses of old people to vitamin supplements and to ultraviolet light, and a large-scale review of 298 old people living at home. The successful completion of such studies gives further support to the view that the technique described in this paper would be of practical value as a method of screening for vitamin D deficiency.

References


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Letters to the Editor

Failure to demonstrate specificity of the morphological and histochemical changes in mucosa adjacent to colonic carcinoma (transitional mucosa)

We have recently come across a case of primary adenocarcinoma of the caecum invading the appendix, which seems to support the suggestion made by Isaacs and Attwood that the morphological mucosal hyperplastic changes seen adjacent to large bowel carcinomas are most probably a secondary effect of the tumour presence.

The patient was a 64-year-old woman who presented with a three-year history of abdominal pain and a recent onset of diarrhoea and general weakness. A mass was found in the right iliac fossa and a malignant tumour was diagnosed, for which a right hemicolecctomy was performed.

The caecum contained a nodular, ulcerated tumour mass that involved the whole circumference of the caecum and extended vertically for up to 6 cm. The tumour was infiltrating the whole thickness of the bowel wall, the ileocaecal region, the base of the appendix, and several mesenteric lymph nodes.

Histologically, the tumour was an adenocarcinoma showing variable degrees of differentiation, some areas being moderately or poorly differentiated and others showing a predominance of 'signet-ring' malignant cells. Stains for argentaffin granules were negative.

Sections of the base of the appendix (Figure) showed tumour tissue, at one side, in lymphatics and invading the wall and adjacent fibrofatty tissue to a variable extent. The appendiceal mucosal epithe-
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