

Associations between visceral adipose tissue, inflammation and sex steroid concentrations in men

Submitted by Emmanuel Lemoine on Wed, 12/11/2013 - 17:08

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Type de publication Article de revue

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Editeur Wiley

Type Article scientifique dans une revue   comit  de lecture

Ann e 2012

Langue Anglais

Date 2012

Num ro 3

Pagination 373 - 378

Volume 78

Titre de la revue Clinical endocrinology

ISSN 1365-2265

Mots-cl s Adult [10], Aged [11], Estradiol [12], Humans [13], Inflammation [14], Interleukin-6 [15], Intra-Abdominal Fat [16], Male [17], Middle Aged [18], Steroids [19], Testosterone [20]

Résumé en
anglais

CONTEXT: In men, obesity and the metabolic syndrome are accompanied by decreased testosterone levels, but little is known about the associations between visceral adipose tissue (VAT), VAT-related inflammation and sex steroids. OBJECTIVE: To examine the relative impact of VAT, abdominal subcutaneous adipose tissue (SAT) and interleukin 6 (IL-6), a marker of VAT-induced inflammation, on testosterone (T) and 17 β -oestradiol (E2) levels in dysmetabolic men. METHODS: We study the NUMEVOX cohort of 229 men, aged 27-77 years, who all had at least one metabolic syndrome criterion (on average three). IL-6, C-reactive protein, Homeostasis Model Assessment of (HOMA) insulin resistance index (HOMA-IR), liver enzymes, E2, LH, sex hormone-binding globulin (SHBG), T, waist circumference and body mass index (BMI) were measured; bioavailable testosterone (BT) was calculated from T and SHBG; MRI-assessed VAT and SAT were analysed in 109 of these men. RESULTS: Visceral adipose tissue was strongly correlated with E2 (Spearman $r = 0.38$, $P < 0.001$) and with BT/E2 ratio ($r = -0.42$, $P < 0.001$), while SAT was not correlated with either. IL-6 was correlated with E2 ($r = 0.19$, $P = 0.007$), BT ($r = -0.19$, $P = 0.006$) and BT/E2 ratio ($r = -0.30$, $P < 0.001$). In multivariate linear analysis, the relation between VAT and E2 was independent of age, BMI ($P = 0.008$), leptin ($P < 0.001$), T and SHBG. Log(IL-6) was significantly inversely related with log(BT) ($P = 0.032$) independently of age, VAT, leptin and HOMA-IR. CONCLUSIONS: 17 β -oestradiol levels were positively associated with VAT, but not with SAT, while T and BT were negatively and independently associated with IL-6. The significant inverse association between IL-6 and T suggests an important role of low-grade visceral fat inflammation in the central hypogonadism associated with the metabolic syndrome.

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DOI

10.1111/j.1365-2265.2012.04401.x [22]

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<dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2265.2012.04401.x>

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