Effect of Moderate Swimming Exercise on Weight Gain in High Fat Diet Rats

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Obesity is one of the most common problems in the world. Imbalance between energy consumption and expenditure is a main factor in weight disorder. Exercise helps losing weight by increasing energy expenditure and modulation of the energy intake. The present study examined protective effects of daily moderate aerobic exercise on preventing weight gain in high fat diet rats.

Materials and Methods: Male wistar rats weighing 200 ± 20 grams were randomly divided into 4 groups of five rats as follow: Normal (cont), Normal and exercise (Ex), sedentary and high fat diet (HFD/sed) and exercise and high fat diet (HFD/Ex). High fat diet (HFD) was made by adding 10% animal oil to the standard rodent chow. Exercise protocol consisted of swimming for 1 hr/day, 5 days/week for a period of 8 weeks. Weight gain was calculated according to weight of each rat in the initiation of exercise and food intake was measured in a certain day each week.

Results: Moderate swimming exercise increased the food intake in control group, which was significant in the first ($P = .001$), third, fourth, fifth ($P = .05$) and eighth weeks ($P = .001$). Moderate swimming exercise decreased the food intake in HFD/Ex group, which was significant in the first and third weeks ($P = .001$). HFD decreased the food intake in the first, second, third, ($P = .001$) fourth and fifth weeks ($P = .05$) in comparison with the control group. There was a gradual increment of weight gain in all groups during the experiment without any significant difference.

Conclusion: Findings of this study indicated that moderate swimming exercise without any calorie restrictions was not sufficient to prevent weight gain.

Keywords: exercise; high fat diet; weight gain.

INTRODUCTION

Obesity is one of the most common problems in the world. It is estimated that 1.6 billion of adult people are overweight and 400 million are obese (body mass index >30 kg/m²). Obesity is a chronic disease and is accompanied with many disorders such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, sleep apnea, dyspnea, mental illness, osteoarthritis, foot and ankle tendinitis, plantar fasciitis, low back pain and chronic lower extremity pain. The exact mechanisms that lead to weight gain or loss are not well known, while behavioral, environmental, inherited, and physiological factors are also involved. Weight loss is considered as the main part of treating this problem. Diet and energy expenditure directly and heredity indirectly affect this process. Imbalance between energy consumption and its expenditure causes weight disorders. If an individual expends more energy than its consumption (active lifestyle) weight loss happens and if energy consumption is more than its expenditure (like sedentary lifestyle or hyperphagia) weight gain happens. Recent study showed food compositions such as its content of fat and
sugar has a very important role in promoting obesity even in absence of excessive food intake.\(^{(4)}\) It is obvious that sedentary life style has an important role in increasing obesity prevalence and exercise is important in fat burn and weigh loss, however, the volume of needed activity to prevent weight gain is not known. In this study, we tested the effect of high fat diet consumptions on weight gain and effects of moderate intensity swimming exercise on the prevention of weight gain in rats fed high fat diet.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Animals**

Male wistar rats (200 ± 20 g) were purchased from Pasture Institute of Iran (Tehran). During the experiment, all animals were kept in standard polyester cages (two rats in each cage) in a room with standard temperature (22 ± 2°C) and humidity (55 ± 5%) with a 12-hour light/dark cycle and free access to water and standard rodent chow. All protocols of the study were approved by Institutional Animal Ethics Committee of Aja University of Medical Sciences (Iran), which followed the NIH guidelines for care and use of animals.

**Experimental Groups and Design**

Following the acclimation phase, rats were randomly divided into four groups (n = 5 per group) as follow: Normal rats (sedentary normal) were healthy animals that remained sedentary (cont), trained normal group were healthy animals that did exercise for eight weeks (Ex), high fat diet and sedentary group animals (HFD/sed), trained and high fat diet group that did exercise for eight weeks (HFD/Ex). High fat diet was prepared by adding 10\% animal oil to standard rodent chow.\(^{(5)}\) Rat’s weight was measured initially, weekly and at the end of eighth week of the exercise. Weekly weight gain was calculated according to initial weight. Food consumption was measured for all rats in certain day of week by digital scale. Each rat was given a pre-weighed pellet, and after 24 hours; its remnants were weighed to determine the food consumption.

**Exercise Protocol**

In the present study, we used endurance swimming as a model of exercise intervention. This study shows that in obese individuals the moderate intensity is more acceptable. Daily training of moderate-intensity swimming for eight weeks can induce cardiac hypertrophy.\(^{(6)}\) The rats in swimming groups performed swimming in a rubber swimming tank with dimension of 55 × 100 × 60 cm for 30 min in the morning. The water depth was enough to prevent from resting and to eliminate bobbing behavior. The tank was filled with tap water and was sufficient for six rats to swim simultaneously. Water temperature was fixed at 32 ± 2°C to prevent hypothermia. The exercise program in the first week of the training began with acclimatization to water. In the first day, rats swam for 10 minutes. Then, the duration of training increased 10 minutes daily until each rat could swim continuously for 30 minutes. In subsequent weeks, the rats could swim 60 minutes a day for five times a week (60 min/day; 9:00-11:00 AM on Saturday to Wednesday).\(^{(7)}\) The control groups remained sedentary in the swimming tank filled with tap water in 5 cm depth in order for animal’s paws to reach to the bottom of tank. After each session, the animals were dried and kept in a warm place to prevent from hypothermia stress.

**Results**

**Food Intake**

Figure 1 demonstrates the weekly food intake for each group during this 8-week experiment. The curve shows that swimming exercise increased the food intake in control group, that is significant in first \((P = .001)\), third, fourth, fifth \((P = .05)\) and eighth weeks \((P = .001)\). High fat diet decreased the food intake in first, second, third \((P = .001)\) fourth and fifth weeks \((P = .05)\) in comparison with sedentary ones. Swimming exercise decreased the food intake in HFD group which was significant in first and third week \((P = .001)\).

**Body Weight Gain**

Table 1 demonstrates the weekly body weight gain in each experimental group during this 8-week experiment. Weekly body weight gain was calculated according to weight of each rat in the initiation of experiment. At the end of week 8 of the experimental protocol, weight gain in control group was 140 ± 17 grams while the high fat diet increased weight gain in HF/sed group to 163 ± 19, although it wasn’t significant. Swimming exercise reduced weight gain in Ex (143 ± 8) and HFD/Ex groups (158 ± 9) in comparison with their sedentary control peers, however this effect wasn’t significant. Results showed an insignificant gradual increment of
weight gain in all groups during the experiment.

Table 1 shows weekly body weight gain of control (cont.) and Exercise (EX), High fat diet (HFD/sed) and high fat diet/exercise (HFD/Ex) groups. Weekly body weight gain started at the week 1 of the diet and activity protocol, and continued to the week 8. Values are expressed as weight gained in proportion to the weight at the initiation of exercise. All values are presented as mean ± SEM.

DISCUSSION

The recent study has shown that moderate swimming exercise significantly increases the food intake in comparison with sedentary rats, however, this increase in food intake due to exercise isn’t accompanied with similar increase in weight gain. Ingestion of high fat diet significantly decreased the food intake in comparison with the control group. Swimming exercise decreases the food intake in HFD/Ex in comparison with HFD/sed which is significant in the first and third week. In all points of the time, there was no significant difference between the groups.

High-fat diet is one of the main causes of obesity, because it increases the energy intake;(8) and it has an important role in weight gain, however, in this study it couldn’t significantly increase the obesity. It may be due to a lesser content of fat (15%) in comparison to other studies. Bravo and colleagues increased the weight gain significantly by adding 35.8% fat to rat’s standard diet. (9) Jeong and colleagues added 24% fat to mice food and made them obese in 8 weeks.(10) Chapman and colleagues, in a study, showed that intra duodenal infusions of fat suppressed the appetite and food intake.(11) Significant decrease in food intake in HFD animal is in agreement with the studies that indicated ingestion of high fat diet decreases food intake by suppression appetite.

It is known that endurance training reduces energy expenditure.(12) There is a brief suppression of hunger and
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CONCLUSIONS
The present findings provide further evidence that swimming exercise without caloric restriction is not sufficient to prevent weight gain and also limiting the food intake is an important factor in weight loss.

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