

Glycemic increase induced by intravenous glucose infusion fails to affect hunger, appetite, or satiety following breakfast in healthy men

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1 **Abstract**

2 Meal-dependent fluctuations of blood glucose and corresponding endocrine signals such as
3 insulin are thought to provide important regulatory input for central nervous processing of
4 hunger and satiety. Since food intake also triggers the release of numerous gastrointestinal
5 signals, the specific contribution of changes in blood glucose to appetite regulation in humans
6 has remained unclear. Here we tested the hypothesis that inducing glycemic fluctuations by
7 intravenous glucose infusion is associated with concurrent changes in hunger, appetite, and
8 satiety. In a single blind, counter-balanced crossover study 15 healthy young men participated
9 in two experimental conditions on two separate days. 500 ml of a solution containing 50 g
10 glucose or 0.9% saline, respectively, was intravenously infused over a 1-hour period followed
11 by a 1-hour observation period. One hour before start of the respective infusion subject had a
12 light breakfast (284 kcal). Blood glucose and serum insulin concentrations as well as self-
13 rated feelings of hunger, appetite, satiety, and fullness were assessed during the entire
14 experiment. Glucose as compared to saline infusion markedly increased glucose and insulin
15 concentrations (peak glucose level: 9.7 ± 0.8 vs. 5.3 ± 0.3 mmol/l; $t(14) = -5.159$, $p < 0.001$; peak
16 insulin level: 370.4 ± 66.5 vs. 109.6 ± 21.5 pmol/l; $t(14) = 4.563$, $p < 0.001$) followed by a sharp
17 decline in glycaemia to a nadir of 3.0 ± 0.2 mmol/l (vs. 3.9 ± 0.1 mmol/l at the corresponding
18 time in the control condition; $t(14) = -3.972$, $p = 0.001$) after stopping the infusion. Despite this
19 wide glycemic fluctuation in the glucose infusion condition subjective feelings of hunger,
20 appetite satiety, and fullness did not differ from the control conditions throughout the
21 experiment. These findings clearly speak against the notion that fluctuations in glycemia and
22 also insulinemia represent major signals in the short-term regulation of hunger and satiety.

23

24

25 **Keywords:** Blood glucose, insulin, nutritional sensing, satiety, hunger, appetite

26 **Introduction**

27 Glucose is the brain's most important fuel and is traditionally been thought to represent a key
28 metabolic signal in the regulation of eating behavior (Mayer, 1952). In the brain, glucose
29 availability is continuously sensed by glucose-sensitive and glucose-responsive neurons that
30 are mainly located in hypothalamus (Burdakov, Luckman, & Verkhatsky, 2005; Karnani, &
31 Burdakov, 2011) and brain stem (Ritter, Dinh, & Zhang, 2000) . Depending on glucose
32 availability, respective neurons modulate the release of anorexigenic and orexigenic
33 neuropeptides such as NPY (Morton, Meek, & Schwartz, 2014). In the body periphery,
34 circulating glucose concentrations are continuously sensed by specific cells located in the
35 portal vein, gut veins, and the bulbous carotid which report respective information to the
36 brain via neuronal afferences (Adachi, Shimizu, Oomura, & Kobáshi, 1984; Hevener,
37 Bergman, & Donovan, 2001; Liu, Seino, & Kirchgessner, 1999; Pardal, & López-Barneo,
38 2002). However, experiments in animals do not support a role of neuronal glucose sensing in
39 the regulation of feeding behavior under normal physiological, non-glucopenic conditions
40 (Dunn-Meynell et al., 2009; Levin, 2007; Levin, Routh, Kang, Sanders, & Dunn-Meynell,
41 2004). Although acute fluctuations in blood glucose have been discussed to be involved in
42 meal initiation and postprandial satiety, scientific evidence for a general role of circulating
43 glucose levels in the regulation of hunger, satiety and appetite in humans, although often
44 implied, is not unequivocal (Flint et al., 2006; Melanson, Westerterp-Plantenga, Saris, Smith,
45 & Campfield, 1999).

46 Acute hypoglycemia as a state of central nervous energy deprivation has been
47 repeatedly shown to provoke feelings of hunger (Schultes, Oltmanns, Kern, Fehm, Born, &
48 Peters, 2003) and to selectively enhance the processing of food stimuli (Brody, Keller, Degen,
49 Cox, & Schächinger, 2004; Schultes, Kern, Oltmanns, Peters, Gais, Fehm, & Born, 2005a;
50 Schultes, Peters, Kern, Gais, Oltmanns, Fehm, & Born, 2005b). Even short-term
51 hypoglycemia during nocturnal sleep increases caloric intake at a breakfast buffet served to
52 healthy men on the next morning (Schmid, Jauch-Chara, Hallschmid, Oltmanns, Born, &
53 Schultes, 2008). In patients with type 2 diabetes, which is characterized by chronic
54 hyperglycemia, the acute normalization of circulating glucose levels by insulin infusion has
55 been shown to provoke an increase in food intake in an experimental setting (Schultes et al.,
56 2005c). Furthermore, increasing circulating glucose levels to about 15 mmol/l, i.e.
57 hyperglycemic level that is usually only seen in subjects with diabetes, enhances satiety in
58 healthy volunteers. Interestingly this effect appears to be predominantly mediated by glucose
59 and not insulin concentrations since hyperinsulinemic euglycaemia in this study did not affect

60 satiety (Gielkens, Verkijk, Lam, Lamers, & Masclee, 1998). However, conflicting data exist
61 on the effects of less pronounced hyperglycemia, i.e. glucose levels of 8-10 mmol/l, induced
62 by continuous intravenous glucose infusion on appetite regulation. While in one study no
63 effect on hunger and satiety ratings was observed (Lavin, Wittert, Sun, Horowitz, Morley, &
64 Read, 1996), another study found an increase in feelings of fullness under the condition of
65 mild hyperglycemia (Andrews, Rayner, Doran, Hebbard, & Horowitz, 1998). Furthermore,
66 another study failed to detect any effect of mild hyperglycemia of hunger and fullness ratings,
67 but found a 15% reduction in subsequent food intake as compared to a euglycemic control
68 condition (Chapman, Goble, Wittert, Morley, & Horowitz, 1998).

69 In addition to direct effects on glucose sensors, fluctuations in circulating glucose
70 concentration might contribute to appetite regulation by triggering concomitant changes in
71 secretion patterns of the glucoregulatory hormone insulin, which itself exerts effects on
72 appetite regulation (Woods, Lutz, Geary, & Langhans, 2006). Applying the approach of
73 intranasal insulin administration to specifically determine central nervous effects of the
74 hormone without eliciting strong peripheral metabolic effects (Born, Lange, Kern, McGregor,
75 Bickel, & Fehm, 2002), we have previously shown that insulin delivered to the human brain
76 acutely decreases food intake in the fasted state (Benedict, Kern, Schultes, Born, &
77 Hallschmid, 2008), increases satiety while reducing snack intake in the postprandial period
78 (Hallschmid, Higgs, Thienel, Ott, & Lehnert, 2012), and in men decreases body fat content
79 during long-term administration. Furthermore, a meta-analysis of a series of meal test
80 studies has indicated that the incremental postprandial increase in circulating insulin rather
81 than glucose levels is associated with feelings of hunger and satiety as well as with
82 prospective food intake (Flint et al., 2007).

83 In the present study we intended to further elucidate the role of circulating glucose
84 dynamics in short-term appetite regulation. In order to avoid, as much as possible, a biasing
85 influence of glucose-associated gastrointestinal hormone modulation, we systematically
86 manipulated glycaemia by intravenous glucose infusion rather than by an oral glucose load.
87 We hypothesized that exogenously induced glycemic fluctuations that are in their extent
88 similar to postprandial glucose excursions are associated with concurrent changes in hunger,
89 appetite, and satiety.

90

91 **Methods**

92 *Subjects*

93 We studied 15 healthy men aged 20 to 40 years (mean \pm SEM: 25.1 \pm 0.6 years) with a body
94 mass index between 20.2 and 25.1 kg/m² (22.8 \pm 0.4 kg/m²). Exclusion criteria were chronic or
95 acute illness, current medication of any kind, smoking, alcohol or drug abuse, obesity and
96 diabetes in first degree relatives. All subjects reported regular eating habits including regular
97 intake of a breakfast meal and did not follow a specific diet (e.g. vegetarian diet). Also,
98 subjects were screened for restraint eating behavior by the three-factor eating questionnaire
99 (Stunkard, & Messick, 1985) and subjects showing a score above 10 (of 21) on the cognitive
100 restraint scale were excluded from the study. Importantly, the subjects were not informed
101 about the primary purpose of the study, i.e. the assessment of feelings of satiety/hunger and
102 appetite, but were told that the study would focus on metabolic variables as blood glucose and
103 insulin concentrations. The ethics committee of the University of Lübeck approved the study
104 protocol and all participants gave written informed consent.

105

106 *Study Design and Procedure*

107 Participants were tested in a single blind, counter-balanced crossover design on two
108 conditions spaced at least two weeks apart. In one condition the subjects received a 10%
109 glucose infusion and a 0.9% saline infusion in the other condition (control condition)
110 according to the protocol outlined below.

111 On each experimental day subjects arrived at the research unit at 07:00 h. They were
112 instructed to eat a light dinner on the preceding evening and then to stay fastened overnight.
113 During the 3-hour assessment period (08:00 h - 11:00 h) the subjects were allowed to read
114 non-arousing books or play video games that did not contain any food cues. At 07:20 h two
115 intravenous catheters were inserted in two veins of the subject's distal forearms to allow
116 infusions and the drawing of blood samples. At 08:00 h subjects ate a light breakfast, i.e. two
117 cereal bars (Corny Cereal Bar, Schwartauer Werke GmbH, Bad Schwartau, Germany; in total
118 218 kcal; 3.4 g protein, 31.6 g carbohydrate, 8.6 g fat). The rather low caloric content of the
119 light breakfast was chosen to avoid a ceiling effect on hunger as well as on satiety (both
120 directions) that would have precluded the detection of glucose infusion effects.

121 In the glucose infusion condition, a total of 500 ml 10% glucose solution (50 g
122 glucose, i.e. 200 kcal) was infused between 09:00 h – 10:00 h, whereas a total of 500 ml NaCl
123 0.9% was infused continuously during the experimental session in the control condition.
124 Blood glucose was measured online (HemoCue B-Glucose-Analyzer, Ångelholm, Sweden) in

125 30-min intervals before the start of the glucose infusion and in 15-min intervals thereafter.
126 The subjects were kept unaware of their current blood glucose concentration. Blood samples
127 were drawn at 07:30 h (baseline), 08:00 h, 09:00 h, 10:00 h, and 11:00 h, centrifuged and the
128 serum supernatant was stored at -80°C until assay. Serum insulin concentrations were
129 determined by enzyme-linked immunoassays as described previously (Schmid, Hallschmid,
130 Jauch-Chara, Bandorf, Born, & Schultes, 2007).

131 Immediately before each blood drawing, subjects rated autonomic and
132 neuroglycopenic symptoms from 0 (none) to 9 (severe) on a standardized semi-quantitative
133 symptom questionnaire (Fruehwald-Schultes et al., 2001) that included the target symptoms
134 hunger, appetite (as a further and idiomatic term for “hunger” in German), satiety, and
135 fullness the remaining 23 symptoms of the questionnaire served to distract the subjects’
136 attention from hunger-related symptoms (data not shown).

137

138 *Statistical analyses*

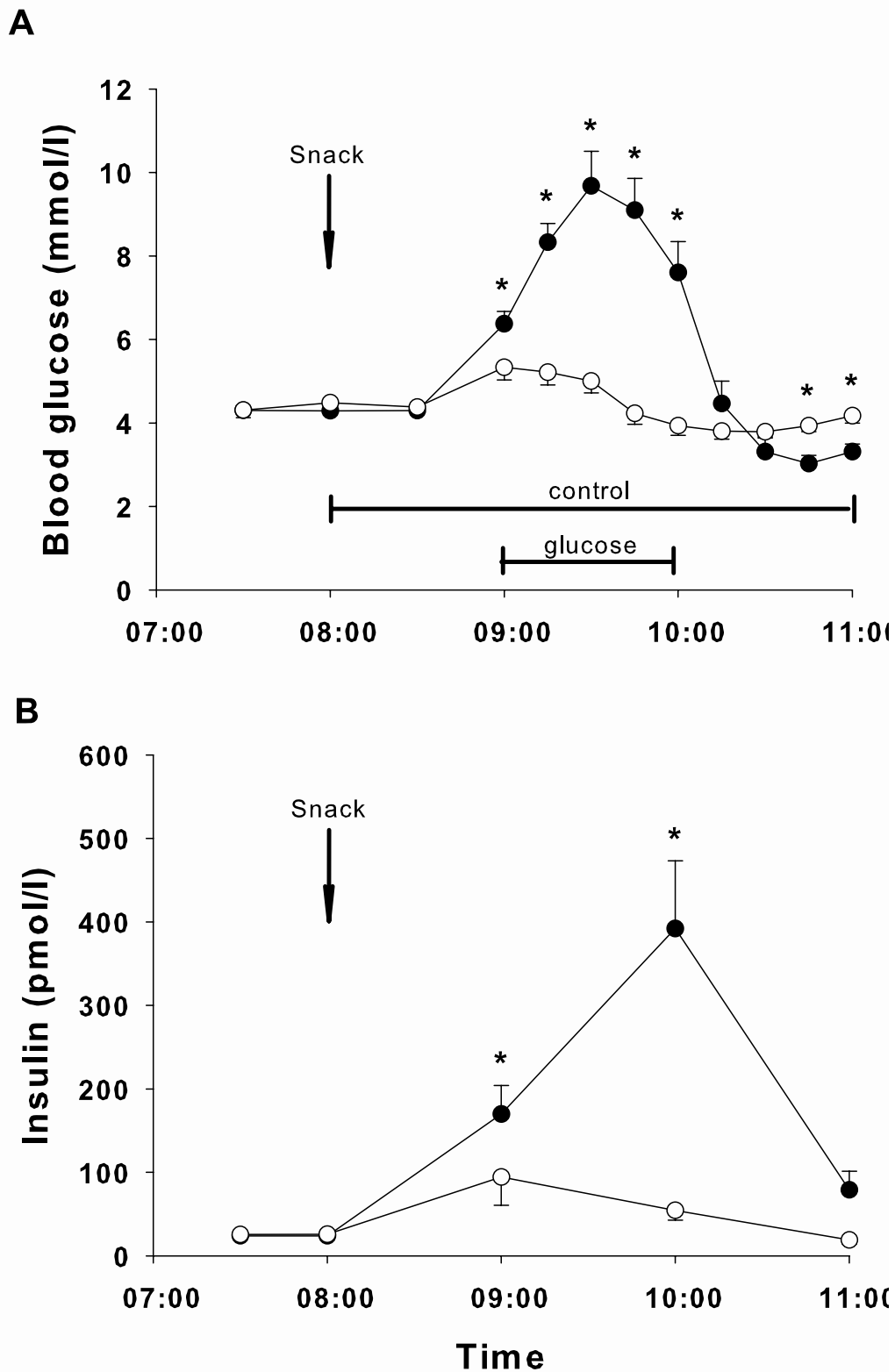
139 All values are expressed as means±SEM. Analyses of blood parameters as well as symptom
140 ratings were based on ANOVA for repeated measures, including the factor ‘condition’ (for
141 the comparison of glucose infusion vs. control condition) and ‘time’ (for the repeated
142 measurements during the experiment). For pair-wise comparisons Student’s t-test was used. A
143 p-value <0.05 was considered significant.

144

145 **Results**

146 *Circulating glucose and insulin concentrations*

147 Before the intake of the snack meal, there were no differences between the glucose infusion
148 and the saline infusion condition with regard to blood glucose (4.3 ± 0.1 mmol/l vs. 4.3 ± 0.2
149 mmol/l, $t(14) = -0.022$, $p=0.98$) and serum insulin (28.5 ± 5.8 pmol/l vs. 22.7 ± 2.6 pmol/l, $t(14)$
150 $= 0.931$, $p=0.37$) concentrations. As expected, during the experiment marked differences in
151 circulating glucose and insulin levels between conditions were observed ($F(3, 14) = 32.14$ and
152 $F(1, 14) = 18.51$, respectively, both $p<0.001$ for ANOVA 'condition' x 'time' interaction
153 term, Figure 1). In the saline infusion condition, subjects showed an increase in glucose and
154 insulin levels in response to the light breakfast that peaked at 09:00 h (glucose: 5.3 ± 0.3
155 mmol/l; insulin: 109.6 ± 21.5 pmol/l). In contrast, during glucose infusion circulating
156 concentrations of glucose and insulin steeply rose and remained significantly higher than in
157 the control condition until 10:00 h ($t(14) < 6.900$, $p<0.001$ for all glucose comparisons; $t(14)$
158 < 4.900 , $p<0.004$ for all insulin comparisons). Peak levels in the glucose infusion condition
159 were 9.7 ± 0.8 mmol/l for glucose (at 09:30 h) and 370.4 ± 66.5 pmol/l for insulin (at 10:00 h).
160 After the end of the glucose infusion at 09:55 h circulating glucose concentrations sharply
161 decreased and at 10:45 h and 11:00 h reached levels that were even lower than in the control
162 condition ($t(14) < -3.374$, $p<0.005$ for both comparisons). Nadir glucose levels were 3.0 ± 0.2
163 mmol/l in the glucose infusion condition and 3.9 ± 0.1 mmol/l in the control condition ($t(14) =$
164 -3.972 , $p=0.001$). Insulin concentrations at 11:00 h had returned to a level that was not
165 significantly different from the saline infusion condition anymore.



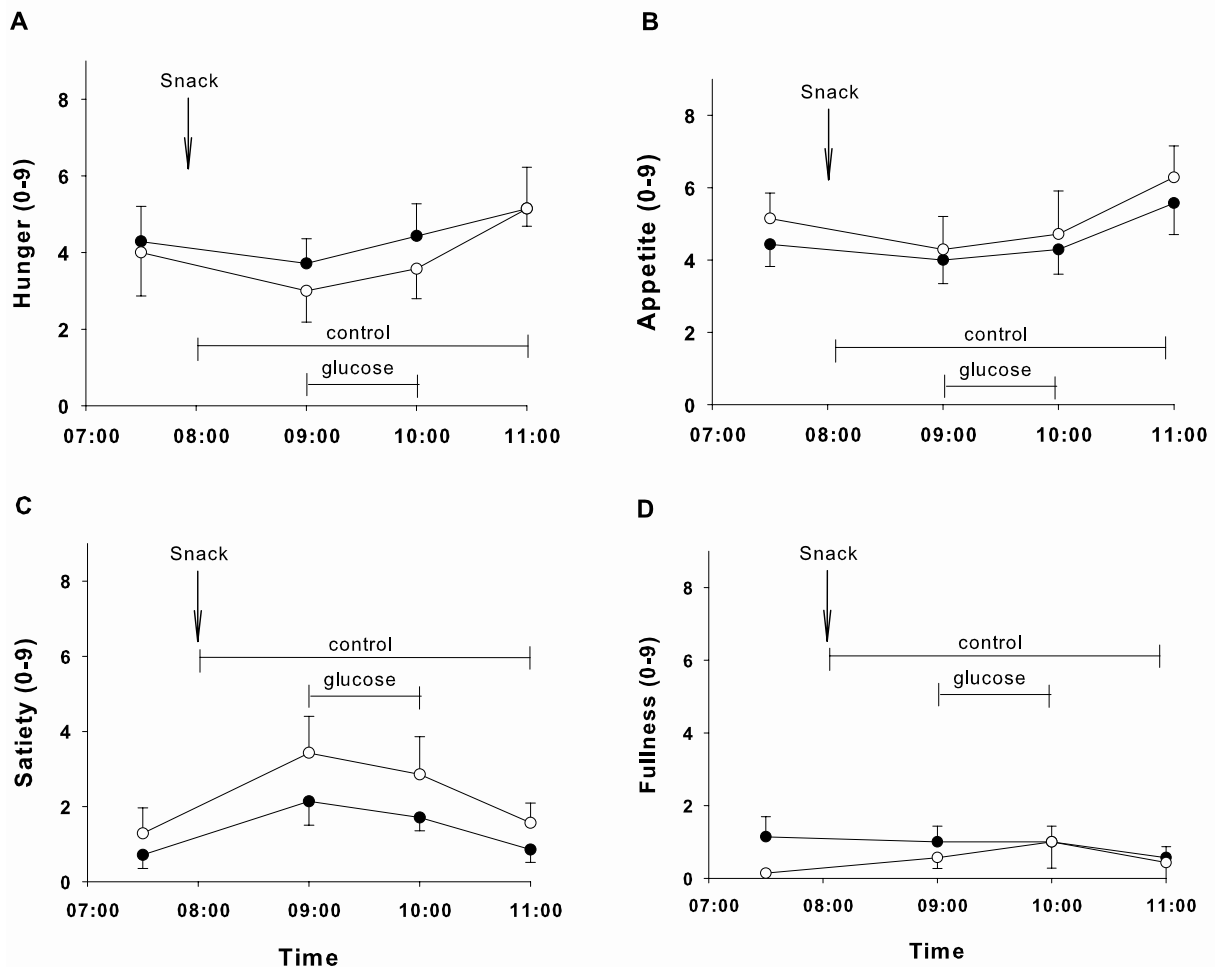
166

167 **Figure 1:** Mean (\pm SEM) concentrations of (A) blood glucose and (B) serum insulin in 15
 168 healthy men during a total period of 270 minutes with either a 60 min infusion of 500 ml 10%
 169 glucose solution (black circles) or a continuous infusion of 500 ml 0.9% NaCl (open circles).
 170 The arrow indicates ingestion of the breakfast snack of 218 kcal at 08:00 h while horizontal
 171 lines indicate the periods of respective infusions. * $p < 0.05$.

172 *Hunger, appetite, satiety, and fullness ratings*

173 Self-rated hunger, appetite, satiety, and fullness did not differ in the morning of both
174 experimental conditions ($t(14) > -0.725$, $p > 0.67$ for all comparisons; Figure 2). After the
175 intake of the light breakfast, ratings on hunger and appetite in both conditions showed a slight
176 (non-significant) temporal decrease with a nadir at 09:00 h followed by a progressive increase
177 until the end of the experiment ($F(2, 14) = 9.929$ and $F(3, 14) = 8.849$, respectively, both
178 $p < 0.001$ for ANOVA main effect 'time'). Satiety ratings in both conditions showed a
179 temporal increase peaking at 09:00 h followed by a gradual decrease ($F(2, 14) = 4.626$,
180 $p = 0.020$ ANOVA main effect 'time'). Fullness ratings remained unchanged during the entire
181 experiment in both conditions ($F(2, 14) = 2.409$, $p = 0.12$ ANOVA main effect 'time'). None
182 of the self-rated symptoms differed between conditions (fullness $F(1, 14) = 0.299$, satiety $F(3,$
183 $14) = 0.787$, hunger $F(3, 14) = 0.020$, appetite $F(3, 14) = 0.242$, all $p > 0.47$ for ANOVA
184 'condition' x 'time' interaction).

185



186

187

188 **Figure 2:** Mean (\pm SEM) scores of self-rated feelings of (A) hunger, (B) appetite, (C) satiety,
189 and (D) fullness during a total period of 270 minutes with either a 60 min infusion of 500 ml
190 10% glucose solution (black circles) or a continuous infusion of 500 ml 0.9% NaCl (open
191 circles). The arrow indicates ingestion of the breakfast snack at 08:00 h while horizontal lines
192 indicate the periods of respective infusions.

193

194

195 **Discussion**

196 To the best of our knowledge this study is the first to induce dynamic fluctuations in
197 glycaemia in humans by intravenous glucose infusion while concurrently assessing subjective
198 feelings of hunger, appetite, satiety, and fullness. **In contrast to our hypothesis, fluctuations of**
199 **blood glucose and insulin that were comparable to those after regular meals failed to affect**
200 **hunger, appetite, satiety or fullness ratings in young healthy men.** These findings challenge
201 the common notion of circulating glucose and insulin levels playing a prominent role in the
202 short-term regulation of hunger, appetite, and satiety after a light meal.

203 Noteworthy, the end of the glucose infusion in our study was followed by a sharp fall
204 in blood glucose concentrations reaching a mild hypoglycemic nadir level of ~ 3.0 mmol/l.
205 Most (Schultes et al., 2005a; Schultes et al., 2003) but not all (Schultes, Schmid, Wilms,
206 Jauch-Chara, Oltmanns, & Hallschmid, 2012) hypoglycemic clamp studies have found that
207 blood glucose levels of 3.0 mmol/l increase feelings of hunger which was obviously not the
208 case here. Considering that blood glucose levels in previous hypoglycemic clamp studies
209 persisted over a longer time (about 45 min) within the hypoglycemic range, it is reasonable to
210 assume that the rather short reactive hypoglycemia following the glucose infusion was not a
211 signal strong enough to stimulate hunger.

212 Our findings might also challenge the popular concept of low glycemic index diets to
213 lose body weight. Advocates of this dietary approach often argue that large glycaemic (and
214 concurrent insulinemic) fluctuations induced by the intake of high glycaemic index foods can
215 trigger feelings of hunger and, thus, on the long run favor weight gain (Roberts, 2003). Our
216 results argue against this notion since the sharp drop in circulating glucose after the end of the
217 glucose infusion remained without effect on hunger ratings, at least within the time period
218 covered by our experiment. Of note in this context, several clinical dietary intervention trials
219 (Papadaki et al., 2014; Sichiari, Moura, Genelhu, Hu, & Willett, 2007; Sloth et al., 2004) have
220 failed to show an advantage of low glycaemic index dietary approaches for weight loss in
221 overweight/obese subjects in comparison with other dietary approaches.

222 Several limitations of our study need to be mentioned. First, we did not assess actual
223 food intake. Previous studies (Beglinger, & Degen, 2006; Benedict et al., 2008; Chapman et
224 al., 1998) have shown that changes in voluntary food intake upon experimental manipulation
225 can occur even without subjective changes in hunger, appetite, satiety, and fullness. Second,
226 we cannot exclude a modulating influence of circulating glucose levels on the regulatory
227 effects of other food-related appetite signals. For instance, a previous experimental study
228 (Lam, Gielkens, de Boer, Lamers, & Masclee, 1998) has shown that hyperglycemia as
229 compared to euglycemia can even reverse the satiating effects of CCK, an effect that is
230 believed to be mediated by a hyperglycemia-induced reduction of the vagal-cholinergic
231 system activity. Also, hyperglycemia has been well documented to modulate pyloric motility
232 during intraduodenal lipid infusion, i.e. an effect that was also associated with reduced
233 perception of hunger feelings (Andrews et al., 1998). Third, we used a numeric rating scale to
234 assess appetite-related symptoms that was, in contrast to the more commonly used visual
235 analog scale (VAS) (Flint, Raben, Blundell, & Astrup, 2000) not formally validated.
236 However, to the best of our knowledge there is no evidence to assume that the use of a VAS
237 would have yield substantially different results. A further limitation is that the study was
238 performed in an only single blind-design. Lastly, since our study only included male subjects
239 our results cannot necessarily be generalized to women.

240 **In conclusion, our findings challenge the hypothesis that glucose and insulin levels**
241 **play a prominent role in the regulation of hunger, appetite, and satiety after a light meal."**

242

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