MALABSORPTION OF LEVOTHYROXINE IN A CHILD AFFECTED BY SHORT BOWEL SYNDROME

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The authors have no financial relationships to disclose or conflicts of interest to resolve.

Background
- Hypothyroidism is a common problem during childhood generally due to autoimmune thyroid disease. It can also occur in the case of severe urinary loss of serum proteins, as well as in the case presented below1.
- The most accepted practice in the treatment of hypothyroidism consists in the oral administration of levothyroxine (LT4).
- Many conditions may affect the absorption of LT4: the adherence to therapy by the patient, fasting state, intake of certain food, certain drugs and gastrointestinal diseases that impair the integrity of intestinal barrier or reduce the area of absorption (gastritis, short bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel diseases, lactose intolerance and celiac disease)2,3.
- Approximately 70% of tablet LT4 is absorbed and the intestinal absorption is maximal (T max) in the two hours after tablet's ingestion. The tablet needs a complete dissolution for the permeation of LT4 in the upper intestine (duodenum and jejunum). This issue explains why patients with short bowel syndrome (due to bowel resection) require a higher dosage of LT42,3.

Case presentation
- A six-year old child affected by congenital multiple jejunal atresias presented TSH 30 µIU/ml (0.6-6.3) and free T4 0.71 ng/dl (0.7-1.8), T3Ab 34.5 µIU/ml (0.4-0.8) and TPOAb 20.8 µIU/ml (0-60).
- He was administered LT4 tablet 25 µg/day (2.5 µg/kg/day); the US showed a normal gland. After one month of treatment: TSH 80 µIU/ml, free T4 0.7 ng/dl, the dosage was increased to 25 µg 5 days per week and 50 µg twice (4 µg/kg/day).
- Although the dosage was high, after one month TSH increased >150 µIU/ml and free T4 was 0.2 ng/dl. Poor compliance could be ruled out.
- A severe malabsorption of oral LT4 was hypothesized.
- LT4 oral solution, available in Italy, has a more rapid absorption than tablets in studies done in adult populations4 and this characteristics would have been an advantage in our patient, so we decided to switch to the treatment with LT4 oral solution at the same dosage.
- After 4-6 months of treatment with LT4 oral solution the values of TSH and free T4 were within the normal range.

Conclusions
- Short bowel syndrome is the most common cause of intestinal failure in children and causes altered absorption of many drugs.
- In this case we observed how the TSH value decreased only after the switch from the LT4 tablets to the LT4 oral solution.
- The most important advantage of LT4 oral solution consists of a faster absorption, which is very crucial in a population of patients having a limited absorption of drugs.
- We can certainly highlight the implications of the liquid formulation of LT4, a novel and useful formulation in cases where the absorption of drugs is clearly hindered.

References

Further information
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Poster presented at:
1232–P3

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Thyroid

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