Regulation of Angiopoietin-Like Proteins (ANGPTLs) 3 and 8 by Insulin

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Objective: Circulating ANGPTL8 has recently been used as a marker of insulin action. We studied expression and insulin regulation of ANGPTL8 and ANGPTL3 in vivo and in vitro.

Design and Methods: Expression of ANGPTL8 and ANGPTL3 was studied in 34 paired samples of human liver and adipose tissue. Effects of insulin on 1) plasma concentrations and adipose tissue expression of ANGPTL8 and ANGPTL3 (in vivo 6-h euglycemic hyperinsulinemia; n = 18), and 2) ANGPTL8 and ANGPTL3 gene and protein expression in immortalized human hepatocytes (IHH) and adipocytes were measured. Effect of ANGPTL3 on secretion of ANGPTL8 in cells stably over-expressing ANGPTL3, -8, or both was determined.

Results: ANGPTL3 was only expressed in the liver, whereas ANGPTL8 was expressed in both tissues. In vivo hyperinsulinemia significantly decreased both plasma ANGPTL8 and ANGPTL3 at 3 and 6 hours. Insulin increased ANGPTL8 expression in human adipose tissue 14- and 18-fold at 3 and 6 hours and ANGPTL8 was the most insulin-responsive transcript on microarray. Insulin also increased ANGPTL8 in cultured adipocytes and IHH but the protein mainly remained intracellular. In vitro in IHH, insulin decreased ANGPTL3 gene expression and secretion of ANGPTL3 into growth medium. Overexpression of ANGPTL8 in CHO cells did not result in its release into culture medium while abundant secretion occurred in cells co-expressing ANGPTL3 and -8.

Conclusions: Insulin decreases plasma ANGPTL3 by decreasing ANGPTL3 expression in the liver. Insulin markedly increases ANGPTL8 in adipose tissue and the liver but not in plasma. These data show that measurement of plasma ANGPTL3 but not -8 reflects insulin action in target tissues. (J Clin Endocrinol Metab 100: E1299–E1307, 2015)

Insulin decreases circulating triglycerides (TGs) by inhibiting adipose tissue lipolysis, very low-density lipoprotein production from the liver, and by stimulating intra-vascular lipolysis of TG-rich lipoproteins in peripheral tissues (1). Angiopoietin-like proteins (ANGPTLs), particularly ANGPTL3, -8 and -4, play a major role in TG
trafficking and mediate at least some of the effects of insulin (2). Of these, insulin regulation of ANGPTL4 has been best studied. In humans, in vivo hyperinsulinemia decreases circulating ANGPTL4 (3, 4). In vitro, insulin down-regulates the Angptl4 mRNA in 3T3-L1 adipocytes (5) and mRNA and protein concentrations in human hepatocytes (4), likely via the transcription factor FoxO1 (6). Mice lacking Angptl4 (7) and humans carrying sequence variants of ANGPTL4, which interfere with either production or secretion of the protein or its ability to inhibit lipoprotein lipase, have reduced levels of TGs (8).

ANGPTL8, also known as betatrophin, TD26, hepatocellular carcinoma–associated gene, c1orf80, refeeding-induced fat and liver (9, 10), and lipasin (11), is a recently identified member of the ANGPTL gene family, which is expressed in adipose tissue and the liver and found in human plasma (12). ANGPTL8 is involved in TG storage in adipose tissue given that Angptl8 knockout mice gain less fat than wild-type mice (13), and siRNA-mediated knockdown of this protein decreases the TG content of 3T3-L1 adipocytes (9). Insulin markedly increases ANGPTL8 expression in 3T3-L1 adipocytes but the protein is not secreted into the culture medium (9). In mouse liver, the Angptl8 transcript increases markedly in response to refeeding (9, 12) but data regarding insulin regulation of plasma ANGPTL8 protein concentrations are lacking, and it is unknown whether plasma ANGPTL8 concentration reflects insulin action in human adipose tissue. This knowledge would seem to be of interest given that several recent studies have suggested plasma ANGPTL8 as a marker of insulin resistance (14–18).

ANGPTL3 is mainly expressed in the liver in humans (8). Treatment with recombinant ANGPTL3 increases circulating TGs (19), and ANGPTL3 inhibits activities of both lipoprotein lipase and endothelial lipase (20, 21) in vitro. In humans, loss-of-function mutations of ANGPTL3 are associated with decreases in TG, low-, and high-density lipoprotein (22). Insulin decreases ANGPTL3 mRNA and protein in human hepatoma HepG2 cells (23). However, there are no data on in vivo effects of insulin on circulating ANGPTL3 in humans.

Secretion of ANGPTL3 and -8 may be mechanistically interdependent given that coexpression of the two proteins in the liver of mice decreases circulating ANGPTL3 compared with expression of ANGPTL3 alone (12). In HepG2 cells coexpression of ANGPTL3 and -8 increases ANGPTL8 protein secretion to culture media compared with expression of ANGPTL8 alone, suggesting that ANGPTL8 secretion might depend on ANGPTL3 (12).

In the present study we 1) compared expression of ANGPTL3, -8, and -4 in liver and adipose tissue samples from the same subjects; 2) determined effects of in vivo euglycemic hyperinsulinemia on circulating concentrations of ANGPTL3, -8, and -4, and on expression of the respective genes in human adipose tissue biopsies; 3) examined how insulin regulates ANGPTL3 and -8 gene and protein expression in cells and culture media of IHH and cultured adipocytes; and 4) determined in Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells whether ANGPTL8 secretion depends on ANGPTL3.

**Study Design and Methods**

**Expression of ANGPTL3, -8, and -4 in human liver and adipose tissue**

**Subjects**
We recruited 34 subjects undergoing laparoscopic gastric bypass surgery. The inclusion criteria were 1) age 18–65 years; 2) no known acute or chronic disease except for obesity based on history, physical examination, and standard laboratory tests (blood counts, serum creatinine, electrolyte concentrations, and electrocardiogram); and 3) alcohol consumption less than 20 g per day. During the week preceding surgery, blood samples were taken after an overnight fast for measuring plasma glucose, serum insulin, liver enzyme, serum TG, and total and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol concentrations as described (24). At the time of surgery, wedge biopsies of the liver and subcutaneous adipose tissue were obtained. One half of the liver biopsy specimen was sent to the pathologist for histopathological assessment, and the rest was immediately frozen in liquid N2. Triglyceride content (percentage of hepatocytes with macrovesicular and microvesicular steatosis), stage, grade, and presence of necroinflammation in the liver biopsies were determined under light microscope by a liver pathologist in a blinded fashion (25). Characteristics of the human subjects studied are summarized in Supplemental Table 1.

**Quantification of ANGPTL3, -8, and -4 mRNA concentrations**

ANGPTL3, -8, and -4 gene expressions were determined in the liver and adipose tissue biopsies by qPCR. Total RNA was isolated with the RNeasy Mini Kit (QIAGEN) according to the manufacturer’s protocol. Reverse transcription was performed using Moloney murine leukemia virus (M-MLV) reverse transcriptase (Invitrogen) and oligo(dT) priming. Power SYBR Green PCR Master Mix and Light Cycler 480 II (Roche Diagnostics) were used for qPCR analysis. Data were normalized to the mRNA of acidic ribosomal phosphoprotein 36B4. Primer sequences are shown in Supplemental Table 2.

**Effects of insulin on plasma ANGPTLs and gene expression in adipose tissue in vivo in humans**

**Subjects**
A total of 18 nondiabetic Caucasian women were recruited based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) age 18–60 years; 2) no known acute or chronic disease other than obesity based on history, physical examination and standard laboratory tests (blood counts, serum creatinine, electrolyte concentrations, and electrocardiogram); and 3) body mass index less than 40 kg/m².

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Exclusion criteria included pregnancy or treatment with drugs that may alter glucose tolerance.

**Whole-body insulin sensitivity and effect of insulin on plasma ANGPTL3, -8, and -4 concentrations and ANGPTL4 and -8 gene expression in adipose tissue in vivo**

Whole-body insulin sensitivity was measured using the euglycemic hyperinsulinemic clamp technique, as previously described (26). After an overnight fast, two 18-gauge catheters (Venflon; Viggo-Spectramed) were inserted, one in the antebrachial vein for insulin and 20% glucose infusion (Insulin Actrapid; Novo Nordisk), and another retrogradely in a heated hand vein to sample arterialized venous blood. The rate and duration of the continuous insulin infusion were 1 μU/kg per minute for 6 hours. Normoglycemia was maintained by adjusting the rate of 20% glucose infusion based on plasma glucose measurements, from the arterialized venous blood collected every 5 minutes. Whole-body insulin sensitivity was determined from the glucose infusion rate required to maintain normoglycemia between 30 and 360 minutes. Blood samples were collected at 0, 3, and 6 hours for measuring plasma ANGPTL3, -8, and -4 concentrations. Needle aspiration biopsies of sc adipose tissue were taken before and after 3 and 6 hours of hyperinsulinemia for measurement of ANGPTL8 and -4 expression. The qPCR was performed as described above, using a geometric mean of the housekeeping genes 36B4 and β-actin as reference. ANGPTL3 was not expressed in adipose tissue.

To compare the insulin responsiveness of ANGPTL8 to other genes in the human adipose tissue transcriptome, we reanalyzed previously reported microarray data deposited in the GEO database (GSE26637) (27). The microarrays were performed on RNA isolated from adipose tissue biopsies obtained at 0 and 3 hours of in vivo hyperinsulinemia (27). The fold change in gene expression was calculated and 100 genes showing the highest increase were selected for statistical analysis. Significances were evaluated using the Student t test and by applying Benjamini-Hochberg multiple-test correction.

The nature and potential risks of the above two studies were explained to all subjects prior to obtaining their written informed consent. The study was carried out in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki. The protocols were approved by the Medical Ethics Committee of the Helsinki and Uusimaa Hospital District.

**Plasma concentrations of ANGPTLs**

Plasma ANGPTL3 and ANGPTL4 concentrations were measured by in-house ELISAs, which have been previously described and validated to be specific, not cross reacting with each other’s antigens (28). Plasma ANGPTL8 concentrations were determined using an ELISA (Aviscera Bioscience, Catalog No. SK00528–02) according to the manufacturer’s protocol. Each assay included an ANGPTL8 control sample supplied with the ELISA kit. The interassay and intra-assay coefficients of variation were 13% and 7%. The ANGPTL8 ELISA assay did not cross react with ANGPTL3 or -4. Western blot analysis of plasma ANGPTL8 in plasma samples taken before and after 3 and 6 hours of hyperinsulinemia was carried out at the Department of Internal Medicine, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX, by using a previously characterized antibody (12).

**Insulin regulation of ANGPTL3 and -8 in vitro**

**Cell culture**

Immortalized human hepatocytes (IHH) (29) were grown on 12- or 6-well CellBIND Surface cell culture plates (Corning) in William’s E medium ( Gibco/Life Technologies) containing 10% fetal bovine serum, 100 U/mL penicillin, 2 mmol/L L-glutamine, 100 μg/mL streptomycin, 50nM dexamethasone, and 100nM insulin (Sigma-Aldrich).

Simpson-Golabi-Behem syndrome (SGBS) adipocytes respond to insulin (glucose uptake) and β-adrenergic stimuli (lipolysis) and thus resemble human primary adipocytes (30). SGBS preadipocytes were grown and differentiated on 6- and 12-well plates as described (30). Briefly, cells were grown in DMEM/F12 containing 10% fetal bovine serum for 3 days until they reached confluence. Differentiation was induced using serum- and albumin-free DMEM/F12 medium with 0.5 mmol/L methyl isobutylxantine, 0.1 μmol/L cortisol, and 2 μmol/L rosiglitazone. Dexamethasone (2.5 mmol/L), 0.01 mg/mL transferrin, 0.2 nmol/L triiodothyronine, and 20 nmol/L human insulin (Sigma-Aldrich) for 4 days. Thereafter, the cells were cultured for 10 days in DMEM/F12 supplemented with 0.1 μmol/L cortisol, 0.01 mg/mL transferrin, 0.2 nmol/L triiodothyronine, and 20 nmol/L human insulin for complete differentiation.

**Effect of insulin on ANGPTL3 and -8 gene and protein expression in IHH and SGBS cells**

Differentiated SGBS cells and IHH were serum starved in DMEM containing 5mM glucose for 24 hours and then treated with 100nM insulin (Sigma-Aldrich) in the same medium for 24 hours. RNA or proteins were isolated after insulin treatment for the measurement of ANGPTL3 and -8 mRNAs by qPCR and protein levels by the ELISAs described above. For determination of ANGPTL3 and -8 mRNA concentrations in cells, total RNA was isolated from insulin-treated and untreated IHH and SGBS cells using the PureLink RNA Mini Kit (Invitrogen). Reverse transcription and qPCR for ANGPTL3 and -8 were conducted as described above. The data were normalized to the geometric mean of two housekeeping mRNAs, the acidic ribosomal phosphoprotein 36B4, and succinate dehydrogenase complex, subunit A (SDHA).

For measurement of ANGPTL3 and -8 protein concentrations, growth media and cell lysates of IHH and SGBS adipocytes (lysed in 50mM Tris·HCl pH 7.4, 1% NP40, 0.25% sodium deoxycholate, 150mM sodium chloride, and 1mM EDTA) were collected after 24 hours. The media and cell lysates were used for ELISA assays. As a control, adiponectin concentrations were measured using Western blotting using an antibody against adiponectin (Sigma-Aldrich; Catalog. No. A6354).

**Expression of ANGPTL3 and -8 in CHO cells**

The cDNAs for ANGPTL3 and ANGPTL8 preceded by the signal sequence of human albumin were synthesized (Genescrypt) and subcloned into a proprietary mammalian expression vector containing a CAG promoter and an IRES-pac puromycin selection marker placed after the ANGPTL open reading frame. CHO cells were transfected with the ANGPTL3 or -8 construct alone or both with Fugene 6 (Promega) and selected with 10–400 μg/mL puromycin (HyClone/ThermoFisher Scientific). After selection, the cells were adapted to suspension culture in OptiCHO medium (Life Technologies) supplemented with 2 mmol/L
L-alanyl-L-glutamine. Cultures were expanded at 37°C, after which the protein was produced for 9 days at 31°C. Finally, media and cells were collected by centrifugation and Western blots were performed to analyze ANGPTL8 (Antibody from GenScript) and ANGPTL3 using an in-house rabbit polyclonal antibody.

**Results**

Expression of ANGPTLs in human liver and adipose tissue

ANGPTL3 expression (qPCR) was detectable only in the liver, whereas ANGPTL8 and -4 mRNAs were present in both tissues (Figure 1, A–C). In the 34 subjects with paired samples, ANGPTL8 mRNA expression in the liver was approximately 3.3-fold higher ($P < .001$) than in sc adipose tissue (Figure 1B), whereas ANGPTL4 was less abundantly expressed in the liver than in adipose tissue (Figure 1C).

Effect of in vivo hyperinsulinemia on ANGPTL3, -8 and -4 concentrations in human plasma

The insulin infusion increased serum insulin concentrations from a fasting concentration of 42 ± 7 to 500 ± 19 pmol/l (30–360 min). Plasma glucose averaged 5.3 ± 0.1 mmol/l in the fasting state and 5.0 ± 0.02 mmol/L during euglycemic hyperinsulinemia.

In vivo euglycemic hyperinsulinemia decreased both plasma ANGPTL3 and -8 significantly, when measured with the ELISA assays (Figure 2, A and C). Plasma ANGPTL3 decreased by 26% from a fasting concentration of 363 ± 37 to 268 ± 23 ng/mL units at 3 hours ($P < .001$) and by 38% to 225 ± 24 ng/mL at 6 hours of hyperinsulinemia ($P < .001$). When measured by the ELISA, the fasting concentration of plasma ANGPTL8 was approximately 19-fold lower than that of ANGPTL3 (Figure 2B). Plasma ANGPTL8 decreased by 17% from a fasting concentration of 20 ± 4 to 16 ± 4 ng/mL units at 3 hours ($P < .05$) and by 18–16 ± 3 ng/mL at 6 hours of hyperinsulinemia ($P < .05$; Figure 2B). When analyzed by Western blotting using a previously characterized antibody (12), no significant change was detected in the amount of ANGPTL8 between the 0-, 3-, and 6-hour time points (Figure 2D). The correlation coefficient between the ANGPTL8 values measured by Western blotting (ANGPTL8/fibronectin) and the ELISA assay was 0.21; $P = .16$. In vivo hyperinsulinemia decreased plasma ANGPTL4 by 14% from a fasting concentration of 5.9 ± 0.9 to 5.1 ± 0.7 ng/mL by 3 hours ($P < .01$) and by 24% to 4.5 ± 0.5 ng/mL ($P < .01$) by 6 hours (Figure 2C).

Insulin regulation of ANGPTL3 in hepatocytes in vitro

The insulin-induced decrease of plasma ANGPTL3 could have resulted from down-regulation of gene expression in the liver. When studied in IHH cells in vitro, insulin decreased ANGPTL3 mRNA expression 3.2-fold (Figure 3A). After 24-hour incubation of IHH, most ANGPTL3 was found secreted into the serum-free growth medium. A minor portion was recovered in the cellular fraction (Figure 3D). Secretion of ANGPTL3 into IHH growth medium decreased significantly by 18% and the cellular protein by 25% upon insulin treatment (Figure 3D). Thus, the insulin-induced 26–38% decreases in human plasma could have resulted from insulin inhibition of ANGPTL3 production in the liver.

Insulin regulation of ANGPTL8 in adipose tissue and hepatocytes in vitro

Reanalysis of microarray data (27) showed that ANGPTL8 was induced 32-fold by in vivo hyperinsulinemia and was the single most insulin-responsive transcript in human adipose tissue (Table 1). The insulin-induced decrease (ELISA) or unchanged concentration (Western blotting) of plasma ANGPTL8 could have been a con-

![Figure 1](https://example.com/figure.png)  
**Figure 1.** Expression of ANGPTL mRNAs in liver and sc adipose tissue. Relative ANGPTL3 (A), ANGPTL8 (B), and ANGPTL4 (C) mRNA concentrations in the liver and sc adipose tissue (AT) from 34 subjects. The data represent mean ± SEM; n = 34; ***, $P < .001$, liver vs sc adipose tissue.
sequence of insulin action on gene expression in adipose tissue or the liver. To examine this possibility, subcutaneous adipose tissue biopsies were collected at 0, 3, and 6 hours of insulin infusion, and \textit{ANGPTL8} mRNA expression was quantified by qPCR. In vivo hyperinsulinemia strikingly induced adipose tissue \textit{ANGPTL8} gene expression by 14- and 18-fold at 3 and 6 hours (Figure 4A).

\textit{ANGPTL4} gene expression decreased by 23 and 51% by 3 and 6 hours of hyperinsulinemia compared with the 0-hour time point (Figure 4B).

Given that the effect of in vivo hyperinsulinemia on \textit{ANGPTL8} gene expression in adipose tissue might be indirect and mediated by changes in circulating metabolites such as free fatty acids, we examined effects of insulin on \textit{ANGPTL8} gene expression in vitro in SGBS adipocytes. Insulin increased \textit{ANGPTL8} mRNA concentration 10-fold (Figure 3C) and the cellular \textit{ANGPTL8} protein by 32% (Figure 3F). \textit{ANGPTL8} accumulated inside the cells, as no \textit{ANGPTL} was detectable in the medium (Figure 3F). These data imply that, although insulin markedly increases \textit{ANGPTL8} locally in adipocytes, this action of insulin does not contribute to circulating \textit{ANGPTL8} concentrations.

To determine whether the observed small decrease in circulating \textit{ANGPTL8} concentrations (ELISA assay) was due to insulin action in the liver, we studied the effects of insulin on \textit{ANGPTL8} gene expression in IHH. Insulin increased \textit{ANGPTL8} gene expression 2.2-fold in response to 24-hour treatment (Figure 3B), and the intracellular \textit{ANGPTL8} protein by 19% (Figure 3E), but only a negligible amount of \textit{ANGPTL8} protein was found in culture medium. These data show that insulin increases \textit{ANGPTL8} locally not only in adipose tissue but also in IHH and that this effect does not seem to contribute to extracellular/circulating concentrations of the protein.

\textbf{ANGPTL3 promotes secretion of \textit{ANGPTL8} by stably transfected CHO cells}

To determine whether \textit{ANGPTL3} modulates secretion of \textit{ANGPTL8}, we created stably transfected CHO cells overexpressing \textit{ANGPTL3}, \textit{-8}, or both. Cells expressing \textit{ANGPTL8} alone were not able to secrete the protein, which accumulated in the cellular fraction as determined by Western blotting (Figure 5). Cells expressing \textit{ANGPTL3} alone secreted this protein abundantly into medium. Abundant secretion of \textit{ANGPTL8} into the culture medium was found in cells coexpressing \textit{ANGPTL3} and \textit{-8} (Figure 5), demonstrating that \textit{ANGPTL3} promotes secretion of \textit{ANGPTL8} in CHO cells. A similar result was obtained using the ELISA assays (data not shown). These data are consistent with those reported in HepG2 cells (12), and raise the possibility that the decrease in \textit{ANGPTL8} (ELISA assay) was a consequence of the decrease in hepatic \textit{ANGPTL3} expression by insulin.

\section*{Discussion}

We examined whether and how insulin regulates circulating \textit{ANGPTL3} and \textit{-8} concentrations and whether changes in their circulating concentrations reflect insulin action in adipose tissue and the liver. Measurement of plasma \textit{ANGPTL4} was included to verify that its plasma levels respond to insulin as has been reported. To this end, we measured circulating \textit{ANGPTL3} and \textit{-8} concentrations and their expression in human adipose tissue biopsies before and after 3 and 6 hours of in vivo euglycemic hyper-
insulinemia. To explain the observed changes in vivo, effects of insulin on ANGPTL3 and -8 gene and protein expression were examined in vitro in IHH and SGBS cells as well as in stably transfected CHO cells overexpressing ANGPTL3, -8, or both.

The present data are novel in showing that insulin decreases plasma ANGPTL3 concentrations in vivo in humans. This decrease is likely to reflect insulin action in the liver. Analysis of paired adipose tissue and liver samples in the present study confirmed that ANGPTL3 is not expressed in human adipose tissue but is found in the liver (8). In IHH cells insulin decreased ANGPTL3 gene and protein expression. These data are consistent with a previous report showing that insulin down-regulates ANGPTL3 mRNA and protein expression in human hepatoma HepG2 cells (23). ANGPTL3 mRNA and protein expression were also reported to be increased in the liver of STZ mice and this increase was attenuated by insulin (31).

![Figure 3](image-url)

**Figure 3.** Effect of insulin on ANGPTL3 and -8 mRNA and protein expression in cultured IHH and SGBS adipocytes. Relative mRNA concentration of ANGPTL3 and -8 in control and insulin-treated cultured IHH (A and B). mRNA expression of ANGPTL8 in control and insulin-treated SGBS adipocytes (C). ANGPTL3 and ANGPTL8 protein concentrations in culture medium (Medium) and cell lysates (Cells) of control and insulin-treated IHH (D and E). ANGPTL8 protein concentrations in culture medium and cell lysates of control and insulin-treated SGBS adipocytes (F). The data represent mean ± SEM (n = 6); *, P < .05; **, P < .01; ***, P < .001. The inset in panel F shows a Western blot of the SGBS adipocyte supernatants from unstimulated (−i) and insulin stimulated (+i) cells, probed for adiponectin.

### Table 1. Effect of Insulin on Gene Expression (Microarray Analysis) in Human Adipose Tissue Biopsies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mRNA</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Fasting Expression</th>
<th>Insulin-Stimulated Expression</th>
<th>Nominal P Value</th>
<th>Fold Induction by Insulin</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANGPTL8</td>
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<td>2719</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFIL3</td>
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<td>9.0E-03</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNPLA3</td>
<td>Patatin-like phospholipase domain containing 3</td>
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<td>25295</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The biopsies were taken before (fasting) and after 3 h (insulin-stimulated) of in vivo euglycemic hyperinsulinemia in 5 normal subjects. Relative expression of the 10 most insulin-induced genes are listed.

* Arbitrary normalized intensity value from gene expression array.
Plasma ANGPTL8 concentrations decreased slightly but significantly during euglycemic hyperinsulinemia when measured by ELISA, although no consistent change was detected by Western blotting. Although the antibody used in the Western blot has been validated previously (12), the semiquantitative nature of this technique does not allow detection of small changes. Lack of an increase in circulating ANGPTL8 in vivo is consistent with the in vitro data measuring ANGPTL8 in cells and culture medium in response to insulin. Neither in the study of Ren et al (9) in 3T3-L1 adipocytes nor in the present study in SGBS cells was insulin able to induce secretion of ANGPTL8 into culture media, implying that adipocytes do not contribute to circulating ANGPTL8. In IHH, insulin increased ANGPTL8 mRNA and protein concentrations but again the protein accumulated intracellularly with only a tiny amount being detected in culture media. The possibility that plasma ANGPTL8 concentration upon hyperinsulinemia is affected by the decreased expression of ANGPTL3 is discussed below.

Lack of an increase in plasma ANGPTL8 was in striking contrast with effects of insulin on ANGPTL8 in both adipose tissue in vivo and in SGBS cells. Indeed, reanalysis of microarray data from five normal subjects (27) showed that ANGPTL8 (previously identified as LOC.55908 in Additional File 4 of this reference) was the most insulin-responsive transcript (32-fold increase) of all genes examined in human sc adipose tissue. When measured with qPCR in a larger group of subjects, ANGPTL8 expression was induced 14- and 18-fold at 3 and 6 hours, which is in accord with the studies in 3T3-L1 adipocytes (9). The increase in the ANGPTL8 transcript was also observed in human SGBS adipocytes in the present study and was accompanied by an increase in cell-associated ANGPTL8 protein. We analyzed the 500-bp proximal promoter region of both ANGPTL8 and -3, and found both positive (CGCCTC) (32) and negative (T(A/G)TTT) (33) insulin-responsive elements in ANGPTL8. However, only negative insulin-responsive DNA elements were observed in ANGPTL3, consistent with the observed negative effect of insulin on the expression of this gene/protein.

ANGPTL8 remained intracellular also when overexpressed in CHO cells, but coexpression of ANGPTL3 and -8 induced secretion of the recombinant ANGPTL8. These data are similar to those in mice in which overexpression of both ANGPTL3 and -8 but neither cDNA alone induces hypertriglyceridemia (12). The molecular mechanism underlying the interaction between ANGPTL3 and -8 is beyond the scope of the present study. Hypothetically, ANGPTL8 may adopt a transport competent conformation in the endoplasmic reticulum only when it interacts with another, fibrinogen-like domain containing ANGPTL3, and may in the absence of the latter be retained by the endoplasmic reticulum quality control apparatus (34, 35). One might thus hypothesize that the decrease in ANGPTL3 in hepatocytes by insulin could have contributed to the decrease in circulating ANGPTL8 concentrations.

Plasma ANGPTL8 concentrations have recently been measured in several studies and suggested to be biomarkers for both type 2 (14–17, 36) and type 1 (37) diabetes, obesity (36), hypercholesterolemia (18), as well as insulin resistance (17). The results have been variable and suggested eg, in obesity either increased (36), unchanged (18) or decreased (15) concentrations. The present data do not exclude the possibility that plasma ANGPTL8 measurements could be useful markers of metabolic abnormalities but suggest that circulating ANGPTL8 concentrations do
not mirror insulin action in either the liver or adipose tissue.

We conclude that insulin acutely decreases circulating ANGPTL3 in humans. This seems to be a consequence of insulin inhibition of ANGPTL3 gene expression in the liver. Insulin markedly up-regulates ANGPTL8 both in human adipose tissue in vivo and in SGBS cells and IHH in vitro. However, plasma concentrations of ANGPTL8 do not increase in response to insulin, implying that insulin action on circulating ANGPTL8 does not reflect its action in adipose tissue or the liver.

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