Endo-neuro-endocrine incretin pathways

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In response to nutrient intake, glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) is secreted from endocrine cells in gastrointestinal mucosa primarily in the distal ileum and colon (3). Numerous actions of GLP-1 have been described, including reduction of blood glucose via several complementary mechanisms and inhibition of gastric emptying. Several recent reviews discuss these actions in some detail (3–7, 10).

Messenger RNA and GLP-1 peptide are also found in several locations in the central nervous system (8, 9, 11). Centrally, GLP-1 is believed to act as a neurotransmitter, and it forms part of one or more anorexigenic circuits (8, 9, 11). Most often, however, GLP-1 is considered as an incretin—a hormone released from the gut that augments postprandial, glucose-induced insulin secretion and glucose disposal (10).

With respect to the incretin function of GLP-1, there are several issues that are not well understood. For instance, how does GLP-1, which has a short half-life and is secreted into the hepatic portal circulation, convey signals to β-cells in the pancreas? Certainly β-cells possess GLP-1 receptors, but how does the peptide get there in sufficient amounts? One obvious possibility is that the effect of GLP-1 to augment insulin secretion is neurally mediated. This possibility was tested several years ago by Balkan and Li (2), who showed in rats that ganglionic blockade was no longer effective. Consequently the authors concluded that portal and peripheral GLP-1 administration in rats augments the insulin response to glucose via neuronal mechanisms. Am J Physiol Regul Integr Comp Physiol 279: R1449–R1454, 2000.


