


Colostrum as part of the treatment in symptomatic neonatal hypoglycemia.

Calostro como parte del tratamiento en hipoglucemia neonatal sintomática.

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ABSTRACT

Neonatal hypoglycemia (NH) is a common condition, though its diagnosis and management remain controversial. The establishment and maintenance of breastfeeding can be compromised in NH patients. To prevent neurological damage, intravenous glucose infusion is typically suggested for patients with symptomatic NH. However, intraoral administration of colostrum as an intervention has been slightly explored. Here, we present a case of a newborn with symptomatic NH who responded positively to an initial intervention of oral colostrum administration. Colostrum therapy in NH management represents a low-cost, noninvasive intervention that promotes the breastfeeding establishment.

KEYWORDS: Hypoglycemia, Neonatal, Colostrum, Colostrum therapy, Breastfeeding.

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RESUMEN

La hipoglucemia neonatal (NH) es una condición frecuente cuyo diagnóstico y manejo siguen siendo controversiales. El establecimiento y mantenimiento de la lactancia pueden verse afectados en pacientes con NH. Para evitar daño neurológico, se recomienda infusión intravenosa de glucosa en pacientes con NH sintomática. La administración intraoral de calostro como intervención ha sido poco explorada. Reportamos el caso de un recién nacido con NH sintomática cuya primera intervención fue la administración oral de calostro con una respuesta favorable. La calostroterapia en el manejo de NH es una intervención de bajo costo, no invasiva y favorece el establecimiento de la lactancia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Hipoglucemia, neonatal, calostro, calostroterapia, lactancia.

Introduction

Neonatal hypoglycemia (NH) is a widespread metabolic condition in newborn (NB) care. Its incidence is difficult to estimate accurately due to ongoing controversy regarding its definition (Hosagasi *et al.*, 2018; Karbalivand *et al.*, 2022). Globally, the incidence is estimated to range from 1.3 to 5 cases per 1,000 live NB, with higher frequencies reported in developing countries (Khan *et al.*, 2010). In healthy NBs, its incidence ranges from 3.4% (Bromiker *et al.*, 2019) to 16.9% (Zhou *et al.*, 2015). In contrast, in NBs with risk factors such as low birth weight, prematurity, and severe neonatal asphyxia, frequencies as high as 77.8%, 55.6%, and 42.9%, respectively, have been reported (Zhou *et al.*, 2015). In a tertiary hospital in Mexico City, the incidence was reported to be 5.9% in late preterm NBs and 11.4% in term NBs with low birth weight for gestational age (Castillo, 2013). Similarly, in a tertiary hospital in Zapopan, Jalisco, an incidence of 16.9% was reported in NBs with risk factors (Quiroz-Lamadrid *et al.*, 2020).

Symptomatic and persistent NH can lead to long-term neurological deficits. Hypoglycemia persisting beyond 48 hours of life is defined as persistent NH and entails the clinician to rule out congenital syndromes, inborn errors of metabolism, or endocrinological disorders (**Table 1**) (Abramowski *et al.*, 2023).

Table 1. Causes of persistent neonatal hypoglycemia.

Congenital hyperinsulinism
Congenital syndromes
Beckwith-Wideman syndrome
Soto syndrome
Costello syndrome
Endocrine disorders
Congenital hypopituitarism
Congenital adrenal hyperplasia
Hypothyroidism
Inborn errors of metabolism
Maple syrup disease
Glycogenosis
Galactosemia
Hereditary fructose intolerance
Fatty acid oxidation defects

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies have shown that NH can cause neurological damage. A report of neurological follow-up in four patients, aged 9 to 12 months, revealed lesions predominantly in the occipital regions, which were identified through an MRI performed before day 50 of life (Filan *et al.*, 2006). In these cases, 3 of the 4 patients had hyperinsulinism, a risk factor for more severe hypoglycemia. In contrast, a follow-up of 35 NBs with symptomatic NH using early MRI (before 6 weeks of life) and neurodevelopmental assessment (after 18 months of age) showed that the pattern of neurological damage is more variable and not limited to occipital regions (Burns *et al.*, 2008).

Recently, increasing evidence has debated the neurodevelopmental implications of transient (lasting less than 48 hours) and asymptomatic NH (Adamkin, 2017; Cacciatore *et al.*, 2022). Low glucose levels (<40 mg/dL) may be part of normal metabolic adaptation in the first hours of a NB (Adamkin, 2017). However, NH screening and interventions can hinder the establishment and maintenance of breastfeeding. Hypoglycemia screening in healthy infants is associated with an increased likelihood of formula supplementation (Mukhopadhyay *et al.*, 2020), which can delay the lactogenesis onset (Haninger & Farley, 2001; Wight, 2021). In addition to the well-established risk factors for NH outlined in Table 2 (Wight, 2021), recent studies have identified other factors that increase the risk, such as cesarean birth (Turner *et al.*, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2022) and hypothermia (Chen *et al.*, 2022; Zhao *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, recent research highlights protective factors against NH, such as prolonged skin-to-skin contact with the mother (Chen *et al.*, 2022; Chiruvolu *et al.*, 2017; Dalsgaard *et al.*, 2019; WHO Immediate KMC Study Group *et al.*, 2021).

Table 2. Risk factors for neonatal hypoglycemia.

<p>Maternal conditions</p> <p>Gestational diabetes or pre-existing diabetes</p> <p>Preeclampsia</p> <p>History of macrosomic babies</p> <p>Substance abuse</p> <p>Treatment with beta-agonists</p> <p>Treatment with oral hypoglycemic agents</p> <p>Administration of intravenous glucose during childbirth</p>
<p>Neonatal conditions</p> <p>Intrauterine growth restriction</p> <p>Low birth weight or low weight for gestational age</p> <p>High weight for gestational age (>90th percentile)</p> <p>Macrosomia</p> <p>Discordant twin</p> <p>Children of mothers with poorly controlled diabetes</p> <p>Prematurity (<35 weeks of gestation)</p> <p>Perinatal stress (asphyxia or severe acidosis)</p> <p>Hypothermia, Polycythemia, or Erythroblastosis fetalis</p> <p>Beckwith-Wiedemann syndrome</p> <p>Midline defects or microphallus</p> <p>Suspected neonatal sepsis or respiratory distress</p> <p>Inborn errors of metabolism</p> <p>Neonate admitted to the Intensive Care Unit</p>

In symptomatic patients with glucose levels below 40 mg/dL (Adamkin & Committee on Fetus and Newborn, 2011) or below 50 mg/dL (Thornton *et al.*, 2015), according to the criteria of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Pediatric Endocrine Society (PES), respectively, treatment with intravenous glucose infusion is well-established (Adamkin & Committee on Fetus and Newborn, 2011; Thornton *et al.*, 2015). Recently, oral dextrose gel has been proposed as a noninvasive and low-cost treatment effective in NH management (Edwards *et al.*, 2022; Roberts *et al.*, 2023; del Carmen *et al.*, 2023). Dextrose gel has even been suggested as a prophylactic method in NBs with risk factors, with potential benefits including preventing NH, reducing maternal-newborn separation, supporting breastfeeding, and preventing neurological damage (Edwards *et al.*, 2022; Roberts *et al.*, 2023). However, these studies are not yet conclusive, and larger-scale studies with longer follow-up periods are required (Edwards *et al.*, 2022).

For over a decade, the effects of colostrum administration compared to interventions like infant formula in NBs of mothers with diabetes have been explored (Tozier, 2013). Prenatal extraction of colostrum and its postnatal administration to NBs has been shown to reduce the NH risk in NBs with risk factors (Johnsen *et al.*, 2021; Foudil-Bey *et al.*, 2021; Forster *et al.*, 2017). However, no study has yet explored the metabolic response to the intraoral administration

of maternally extracted colostrum in managing symptomatic NH. Here, we present the clinical case of an NB with symptomatic NH who received oral colostrum as an initial intervention when resources for intravenous glucose administration were not immediately available.

Materials and methods: Case presentation

The patient was a full-term male NB at 37 weeks of gestation, with low birth weight for gestational age according to World Health Organization charts (2440 grams). He was the product of the first pregnancy of a healthy 35-year-old mother. The pregnancy was normal, with spontaneous labor onset. The birth was a natural, unmedicated vaginal delivery, allowing for immediate skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding within the first 30 minutes of life. A natural childbirth without medical intervention refers to the absence of obstetric analgesia, anesthesia, synthetic oxytocin, or any other interventions that could interfere with the natural labor progression. The mother-child dyad was released fourteen hours after birth, with no dehydration evidence.

At 44 hours of life, the patient was brought to the emergency department following a phone report of hypoactivity and reduced interest in feeding. Since the typical timeframe for the onset of lactogenesis II (mature milk production) ranges between 48 and 120 hours postpartum, the mother was still in the colostrum lactation phase, the newborn milk (Neville *et al.*, 2001). On examination, the patient was hypoactive but had stable vital signs, no clinical signs of dehydration, and had lost 200 grams (8% of his birth weight). Other than hypoactivity and reduced feeding (hyporexia), no additional neurological symptoms were observed. A glucose level measured via dextrostix test showed 25 mg/dL, then confirmed through a serum glucose level of 36 mg/dL. It was also found with multifactorial hyperbilirubinemia; ruling out polycythemia, neonatal sepsis, and hypernatremic dehydration as causes of hypoactivity.

While the patient was being administered intravenous glucose, the mother was assisted in colostrum extraction. Sixteen milliliters of colostrum were manually expressed (Figure 1), stored at room temperature, and immediately spoon-fed to the newborn. Manual extraction of colostrum in the first few days postpartum is recommended. Before extraction, it is important to wash hands thoroughly, gently massage the breasts, and stimulate the oxytocin reflex. The thumb should be positioned above the nipple and areola, with the index finger below, opposite the thumb. A gentle pressing motion should be applied toward the chest wall, avoiding squeezing the nipple to prevent obstruction of the milk ducts (Figure 1). The motion should be repeated until colostrum drips, and the process should last 5 to 7 minutes per breast. Due to the dense consistency and small volume of colostrum, it is advisable to collect it in a small container or spoon.

Upon noticing immediate clinical improvement (increased activity and interest in eating) after the intervention, serum glucose was taken at the time of accessing an intravenous line (forty-three minutes after oral colostrum intake), which was reported to be 302 mg/dL. During the breastfeeding clinical assessment, two notable findings were identified: ankyloglossia in the NB and Raynaud's phenomenon in the nipples of the mother, both of which may have hindered optimal breastfeeding since hospital discharge. During the hospital stay, the breastfeeding technique was

corrected, and the patient was referred for subspecialty evaluation of ankyloglossia. A frenotomy was performed on an outpatient basis, and Raynaud's phenomenon was managed with physical measures. Intravenous glucose was no longer required for the patient.

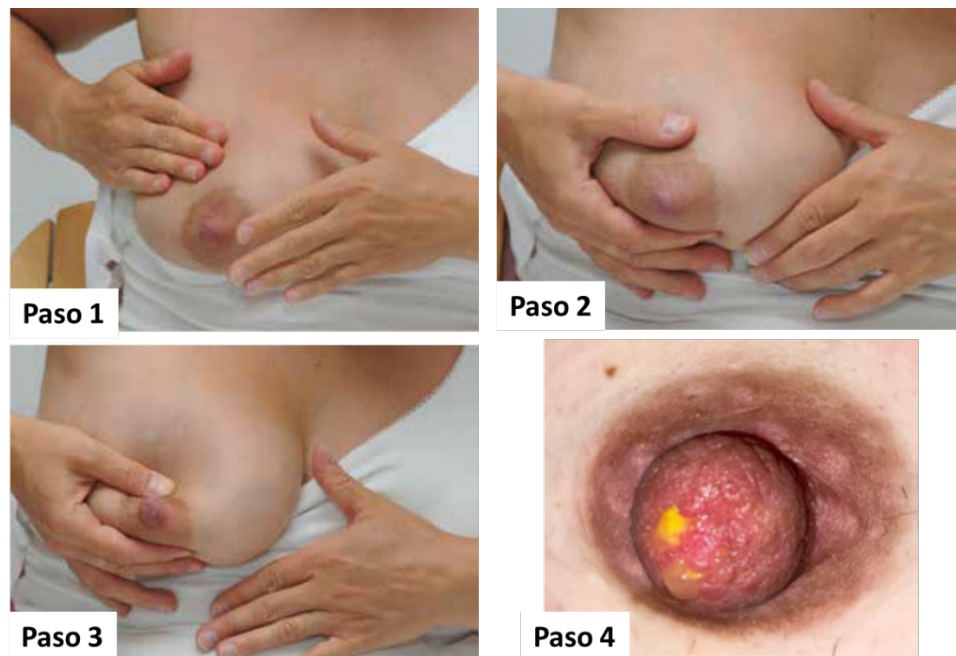


Figure 1. Manual colostrum extraction technique. Step 1) Gently massage the breasts; Step 2) Place the thumb on the breast above the nipple and areola, and the index finger underneath, opposite the thumb; Step 3) Gently press towards the ribs and release the pressure; Step 4) Repeat the movement (press and release) until the first drops are seen. (Data retrieved from Antenatal Hand Expressing. Maternity Services Lothian 2023).

The neurological development of the patient during his pediatric follow-up has been favorable, achieving developmental milestones in the expected ranges for his age. Currently, the patient is 8 years 10 months old and is in the third year of elementary school with excellent school performance and adequate neurological development. He was exclusively breastfed until he was six months old and was weaned at 5 years of age. The breastfeeding experience of the mother was satisfactory, meeting her own breastfeeding goals.

Observations and discussion

NH is one of the most feared clinical entities in NBs and is a frequent cause of separation from the mother-infant dyad in the first days of life (Wight, 2021; Giouleka *et al.*, 2023). In the case presented here, the patient had several risk factors for hypoglycemia and difficulty establishing

breastfeeding: gestational age of 37 weeks, low weight for gestational age, ankyloglossia, early discharge home, and the presence of Raynaud syndrome in the mother.

The therapeutic response to colostrum (colostrum therapy), with a glycemic control of 302 mg/dL forty-three minutes after intervention, demonstrates the NB remarkable ability to compensate for low glucose levels through different metabolic pathways (Wight, 2021). Colostrum is an exceptional fluid, concentrated, rich in proteins, lactoferrin, fat-soluble vitamins, minerals, growth factors, and cells. In addition to its immunological properties, colostrum comprises a high content of other macronutrients that aid in counter-regulating NH (Lawrence & Lawrence, 2022). It is estimated to provide approximately 55 cal/dL, along with its immune components (Bardanzellu *et al.*, 2017). Almost a decade ago, research showed that colostrum from mothers with obesity contained higher concentrations of glucose, fat, and caloric content (Fujimori *et al.*, 2015), as well as leptin and adiponectin (Fujimori *et al.*, 2017). The elevated expression of these substances in the colostrum of mothers of NBs at risk for NH could have significant biological implications for the metabolic regulation of NBs. The colostrum use as a therapeutic intervention in NH, as well as these findings, merits further investigation.

Although there are already several studies exploring oral dextrose gel administration as part of treatment for asymptomatic HN (Hosagasi *et al.*, 2018; Wight, 2021; Edwards *et al.*, 2022; del Carmen *et al.*, 2023; Gregory *et al.*, 2020; Meneghin *et al.*, 2021; Harding *et al.*, 2021; Stanzo *et al.*, 2020), and that it has even been shown to be a cost-effective intervention compared to standard treatment (Glasgow *et al.*, 2020), there are trials that suggest it is not a superior intervention to offering formula milk (Coors *et al.*, 2018). Continuing to feed the infant as an intervention has been little studied (Dalsgaard *et al.*, 2019; Tozier, 2013; Johnsen *et al.*, 2021; Gregory *et al.*, 2019). The AAP suggests continuing to feed the infant with asymptomatic HN <25mg/dL at initial screening in infants younger than 4 hours, and <35mg/dL in NBs from 4 to 24 hours of extrauterine life (Hosagasi *et al.*, 2018). Feeding with a breast milk substitute does not have the same benefits as continuing to feed human milk, and few studies denote these implications for both nutritional and immunological content as well as the physiological breastfeeding process (Tozier, 2013; Johnsen *et al.*, 2021; Van Kempen *et al.*, 2020). Breastfeeding and regulating maternal metabolism will be critical in the metabolic programming of the NB (Elbeltagi *et al.*, 2023).

In this case, we did not have any other resources in the emergency department as immediate as colostrum. Hence, we started treatment with colostrum. Since there was an immediate clinical response to colostrum ingestion, it was decided not to continue intervening. Intravenous access in a pediatric patient, especially in small patients such as NBs, can be a challenge for not-so-trained personnel (Cuper *et al.*, 2012). Colostrum collection is a no-cost alternative that, in the hands of someone trained, can be obtained immediately.

Interventions in an NB can become barriers to the establishment of breastfeeding. The lack of breastfeeding counseling at discharge is also a challenge to resolve. The mother of the patient we report describes returning to the hospital with a condition that put the health of her baby at risk as an experience that diminished her confidence in her ability to breastfeed. Good communication with the mother explaining the risks her baby presented for NH developing, as well

as showing proper breastfeeding technique and making colostrum part of the NB treatment, was helpful in regaining her confidence.

For a proper breastfeeding technique, the mother must be in a comfortable position. The baby should be positioned in front of the breast of the mother, held firmly with the body aligned, preventing the baby from turning his head and positioning the nose in front of the nipple (figures 2 and 3). The nipple is placed in front of the nose of the infant so that the baby can look for it and widely open the mouth. The mouth of the infant should be wide open before bringing the baby close to the breast. The mother should make sure that the latch-on is deep and prevent the baby from grasping the nipple alone. This will avoid pain due to poor latch-on. Once at the breast, the baby should keep its mouth open and make a firm seal around the breast, and preferably the chin of the baby should touch the breast of the mother. A NB should have a breastfeeding frequency of at least 8 feedings per day, with each feeding lasting between 20 and 40 minutes.



Figure 2. In the comfortable mother position, the body of the baby is aligned. The use of a pillow or cushion is optional (own photos).



Figure 3. In the comfortable mother position, the body of the baby is aligned, facing the breast in a deep latch, the baby's mouth wide open, baby's chin close to the mother's breast (own photos).

Conclusions

Oral colostrum administration is a no-cost, non-invasive intervention that supports the establishment of breastfeeding and supports the confidence of the mother in her ability to feed her baby. Studies are needed to demonstrate the efficacy of colostrum therapy as part of interventions in the prevention and treatment of symptomatic NH. The clinical benefits of colostrum administration in preterm infants have been reported (Kumar et al. 2023). All first-contact pediatricians must have the knowledge to support manual colostrum extraction, which can be useful to prevent NH or even to provide immediate care in case of metabolic disturbance. It is also important to know to detect conditions that could complicate the establishment of lactation, as in this case ankyloglossia in the infant and Raynaud syndrome in the mother. The case we report demonstrates to us the value of adopting hospital practices for the management of HN that facilitate exclusive breastfeeding (Perez et al., 2019; Stewart et al., 2016), especially with high-risk NBs (Wight, 2021; WHO Immediate KMC Study Group et al., 2021; Tozier, 2013).

Author contribution

Work conceptualization, Contreras K; development of the methodology, observation, discussion, and conclusions, Contreras K and Rojas A. All authors of this manuscript have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript.

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Statement of Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from the mother, father, and patient involved in the study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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