

MINI FOCUS ON DIABETES

EDITORIAL COMMENT

SGLT1 and Sweet Genetic Insights Into Cardiometabolic Risk*



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There are 2 families of glucose transporters, the facilitative (GLUT) and the sodium-dependent (SGLT) transporters (1). The SGLTs function by secondary active transport using the Na⁺ gradient. The SGLT1 isoform is present in small intestinal enterocytes and renal proximal tubule cells, where it mediates glucose uptake (2). Homozygous loss-of-function variants in *SLC5A1*, the gene encoding SGLT1, lead to glucose/galactose malabsorption with life-threatening diarrhea in newborns. In this issue of the *Journal*, Seidelmann et al. (3) show that heterozygosity for a haplotype of 3 common missense variants in *SLC5A1* (N51S/A411T/H615Q) that cause a modest decrease in SGLT1 function and are present at a frequency of 6.7% in the population is associated with a decreased prevalence of impaired glucose tolerance on oral glucose tolerance tests and obesity in subjects of European and African origin. In subjects of European origin, *SLC5A1* variants are also associated with a decreased prevalence of hypertension, lower diastolic blood pressure, decreased heart rate, and lower uric acid levels. In addition, the investigators show that the haplotype is associated with a decreased incidence of diabetes mellitus, heart failure, and death over a median follow-up period of 25 years.

The study design by Seidelmann et al. (3) in this issue of the *Journal* was robust, and its findings have potentially broad implications. A discovery cohort of 8,478 subjects and a replication cohort of 6,784 subjects were analyzed. The discovery cohort included subjects of European origin from 4 U.S. communities. The replication cohorts were subjects of African origin from the same U.S. communities and subjects recruited from at least 6 Finnish communities. The principal associations identified by the investigators were present in both racial groups and in geographically distant communities. The discovery cohort had excellent longitudinal follow-up with a median of 25 years.

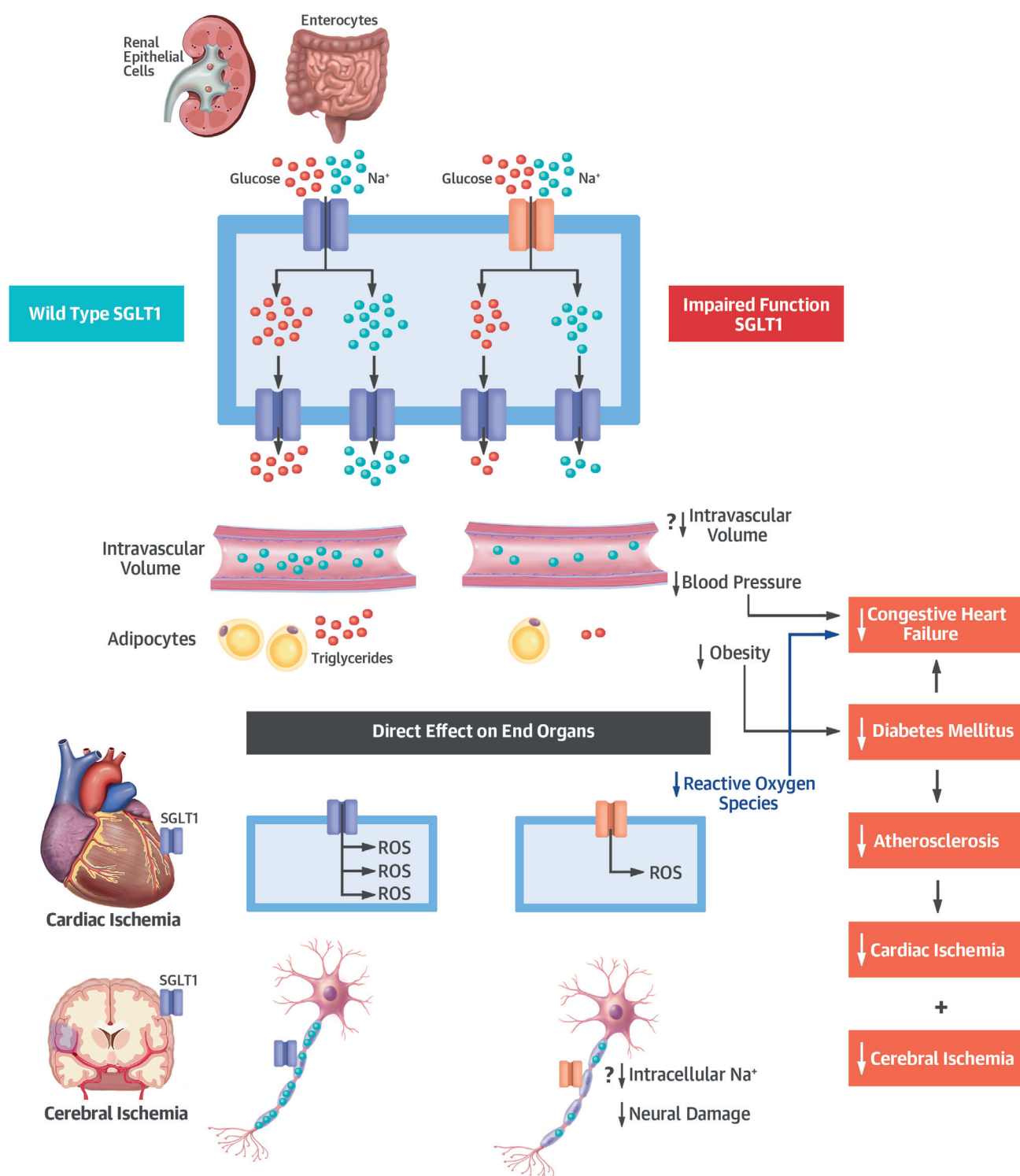
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The design of this study (3) is appropriate to find associations between gene alleles and disease outcomes. However, alone, it can be used only to infer causation between exposures and outcomes, and it cannot prove the biological mechanisms that drive such causation. The simplest mechanistic pathway to explain the influence of *SLC5A1* variants on outcomes would be that decreased intestinal glucose and galactose absorption and possibly decreased renal reuptake of glucose from the ultrafiltrate lead sequentially to lower net caloric balance, decreased obesity, improved insulin sensitivity, improved glucose tolerance, and less heart failure (Figure 1). However, the association of the *SLC5A1* haplotype with impaired glucose tolerance remains significant after inclusion of obesity as a covariate, suggesting the presence of other mechanistic pathways in addition to obesity. Indeed, the investigators propose several plausible explanations for the protective effect of the identified haplotype, including increased levels of beneficial hormones such as glucagon-like peptide-1, decreased fibrosis secondary to low glucose levels, and a direct cardioprotective role.

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FIGURE 1 Model of SGLT1 and Cardiometabolic Risk



Potential mechanisms by which sodium-glucose cotransporter 1 (SGLT1) contributes to cardiometabolic risk. ROS = reactive oxygen species.

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