P. HOUPERT, SMAIL MEHENNAOUI, B.JOSEPH ENRIQUEZ, G. MILHAUD:

Pharmacokinetics of cadmium following intravenous and oral administration to non-lactating ewes: 
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Pharmacokinetics of cadmium following intravenous and oral administration to non-lactating ewes

P Houpert *, S Mehennaoui, B Joseph-Enriquez, B Federspiel, G Milhaud

École nationale vétérinaire d'Alfort, service de pharmacie et toxicologie, équipe associée INRA-ENVA : Cadmium et aliment d'origine animale, 7, avenue du Général-de-Gaulle, 94704 Maisons-Alfort cedex, France

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Summary — In a preliminary study, ewes received daily oral cadmium chloride administrations and cadmium concentration was measured in blood and tissues. A pharmacokinetic analysis of cadmium disposition was then carried out in ewes administered cadmium chloride iv and, 21 months later, orally in the same ewes. Pharmacokinetic parameters were analysed using a 3-compartment open model. The systemic availability was 0.15–0.5%, the half-life of elimination was 100–150 days, the blood clearance was 0.12–0.16 l.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ and the steady-state volume of distribution was 17–35 l/kg. Following iv administration cadmium was found in tissues about 2 years later.

cadmium / ewe / kinetics / bioavailability

Résumé — Pharmacocinétique du cadmium par voie intraveineuse et orale chez la brebis non lactante. Lors d'une première étude, du chlorure de cadmium a été administré à doses répétées par voie orale à des brebis et les concentrations sanguines et tissulaires en cadmium ont été mesurées. Puis l'étude de la pharmacocinétique du cadmium a été réalisée après injections intraveineuses de chlorure de cadmium à des brebis, suivies, 21 mois plus tard, d'administrations répétées de chlorure de cadmium par voie orale. Les paramètres pharmacocinétiques ont été calculés selon un modèle tricompartimental ouvert, en considérant simultanément l'ensemble des données. La biodisponibilité du cadmium est de l'ordre de 0,15 à 0,5%, le temps de demi-vie d'élimination de 100 à 150 jours, la clairance sanguine de 0,12 à 0,16 l.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ et le volume de distribution à l'équilibre de 17 à 35 l/kg. Les concentrations en cadmium mesurées dans les tissus montrent qu'une partie du cadmium administré par voie intraveineuse reste stockée dans les organes après un délai de 2 ans.

cadmium / brebis / cinétiqe / biodisponibilité

* Correspondence and reprints
INTRODUCTION

Cadmium is a widely distributed heavy metal in industrialized countries and is known for its cumulative properties in continental ecological cycling (Nriagu, 1980; Sharma, 1980). In animals, cadmium accumulates mostly in the liver and the kidney. In experimental animals, cadmium can cause a nephrotoxicosis in the same way as in human beings (Powell et al, 1964; Murakami et al, 1983; Nordberg, 1984). The purpose of studying cadmium pharmacokinetics in the ewe is to provide basic information on the systemic availability and persistence of this heavy metal in ovine tissues. This could lead to new methods to modulate this accumulation, thus reducing animal contributions of cadmium to the consumer diet, as Miller previously proposed (Miller et al, 1969). In a previous experiment, we documented the linearity of cadmium kinetics after iv administrations in ewes (Han et al, 1994). The purpose of the present experiments was to study the disposition of cadmium after multiple oral administrations of cadmium chloride in the same ewes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Animals

Seven Lacaune-Prealps crossbreed ewes of about 2 years of age at the beginning of the experiment were used. They came from the Brouessy farm (INRA, France). Throughout study, the mean weight was 56 kg and no diseases were detected.

The animals were kept in the sheepfold of the École nationale vétérinaire d'Alfort, France. They received 1 kg of granulated feed and 0.3 kg of hay daily in the morning. The granulated feed was composed of oats (47%), dehydrated lucern (30%), chopped straw (20%) and a mineral additive (3%). Water was given ad libitum. Cadmium, calcium, zinc, iron, magnesium, copper and selenium levels were measured in the drinking water, hay and granulated feed. In the granulated feed, protein, phosphorus, manganese, lead and vitamin D levels were also determined.

Experimental design

In the first experiment, 3 ewes (No 0562, 0880, 9315) received daily oral cadmium chloride administrations at a dosage of 2 mg.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for 16 d and 0.3 mg.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for an additional 16 d at which time they were slaughtered.

In the second study, another 3 ewes (No 9090, 9091, 9501) received 3 iv administrations of cadmium at 3 different dosages (0.033, 0.1, 0.33 mg/kg). The order of the 3 administrations was assigned to each ewe according to a 3 x 3 latin square design and a washout period of 21 d was respected between each administration. At 641 d after the first iv administration, the same ewes received daily oral cadmium chloride: 2 mg.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for 21 d and 1 mg.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for 19 d.

Subsequently, the same ewes received cadmium acetate orally for 31 d at a dosage of 1 mg.kg⁻¹.d⁻¹, at which time they were slaughtered. Cadmium blood concentrations measured after acetate cadmium administrations were not used for pharmacokinetic analysis, but increased cadmium concentrations in tissues. One animal (No 9055) was not exposed to cadmium and was used as a control.

Administration of cadmium

For oral administration, cadmium was enclosed in a gelatin capsule and placed over the base of the tongue. The capsule was immediately swallowed.

In the second experiment, the ewes received iv administrations of cadmium solutions prepared with cadmium chloride (CdCl₂, Merck, Nogent-sur-Marne, France). The concentrations selected for the injection of 2-3 ml of solution were 0.66, 2 and 6.6 mg/ml for the dosages of 0.033, 0.1 and 0.33 mg/kg, respectively. To avoid hemolysis, the osmolarity of the solutions was made similar to that of serum by adding sodium chloride. The solutions were sterilized in autoclaves for 20 min. The iv injections were performed in the left jugular vein via a catheter (Intraflon 2/Vygon).
Sampling

Blood samples (2 ml) were collected from the right jugular vein into special heparinized tubes under vacuum (Ref 367735 Vacutainer tubes, Beckton Dickinson, Maylan, France, known not to interfere with the analysis of trace elements, metals or metalloids).

In the first experiment, blood was collected twice a day: in the morning before cadmium administration and 6 h after cadmium administration. On d 15 and 30, blood was collected at 0, 30, 45, 60, 75, 90, 105, 120, 150, 180, 240 and 360 min after cadmium administration.

In the second study, after each iv administration, the blood collections extended over a 21-d period. Samples were taken at 24, 23.5, 23, 22, 21, 20, 18 and 16 h and 5 min before the first cadmium administration. After iv administrations samples were collected at 2, 5, 8, 10, 20, 30 and 60 min and 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 10 h and at 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 15 and 20 d. Three additional samples were taken at d 187, 208 and 237 after the first iv administration of cadmium. During the period of oral administration, blood samples were taken 3 times per week from day 636 (4 d before the first oral cadmium chloride administration on d 641), the morning before cadmium administration and every morning before cadmium administration from d 671 to 680.

The blood was stored at 4°C until analysis. Ewes were slaughtered 1 d after the last oral cadmium administration and liver, kidney, muscle, abomasum and small intestine samples were collected and frozen at -20°C until analysed for their cadmium content.

Cadmium measurement

Blood cadmium concentrations were determined by electrothermal atomic absorption spectrophotometry with a spectrophotometer 1100B Perkin Elmer AGA 700 (Hoenig and De Kersabiec, 1990), using a technique of direct measurement after dilution of samples 1:10 in 0.05 N nitric acid in the presence of triton, according to the technique recommended by Lauwerys et al (1990) (decomposition temperature: 550°C; atomization temperature: 1 450°C). The linearity of the calibration curve extended to 40 μg/l blood. The limit of detection was estimated to be 0.3 μg/l, the limit of quantification was estimated to be 0.8 μg/l, and the intraday coefficient of variation was 25% at 0.8 μg/l, 15% at 1 μg/l, 8% at 2 μg/l and 4% at 5 μg/l.

Tissue samples were dry-ashed at 450°C to obtain white ashes. After destruction, the samples were dissolved in 5 ml (5 N) nitric acid and diluted with distilled water to final volume of 50 or 100 ml. The cadmium concentration was determined by electrothermal atomic absorption spectrophotometry (decomposition temperature: 300°C; atomization temperature: 1 400°C). After appropriate dilution, concentrations were read using a calibration curve. Method accuracy was controlled with certified material (bovine liver 1577b of NIST (US Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg MD, USA), pig kidney 0675 of BCR (Commission of the European Communities, Community Bureau of Reference, Brussels, Belgium). Detection limit was 4 μg/kg dry matter, quantification limit was 15 μg/kg dry matter and the intraday coefficient of variation was 4% at 100 μg/kg dry matter and 2% at 200 μg/kg dry matter.

Pharmacokinetic analyses

Pharmacokinetic analyses were computed using a program of nonlinear regression adapted from Multi (Yamaoka et al, 1981). The general poly-exponential equation was fitted to the iv data:

\[ C(t) = \sum_{i=1}^{a} Y_i \exp(-\lambda_i t) \]

In this equation (corresponding to a iv single administration), C is the cadmium concentration at time t, Y_i is the coefficient of the i\textsuperscript{th} exponential term. Initial estimates were obtained using linear regression methods on the data following the third iv dose. These estimates were refined by nonlinear regression. The number of exponents (2 or 3) needed for each data set was determined by application of Akaike’s information criterion (Yamaoka et al, 1978).

Cadmium blood concentrations corresponding to the multiple cadmium chloride oral and iv administrations were calculated in each ewe using the principle of superposition.
The values of the basic kinetic parameters were determined from the data of the second experiment. The volume of the central compartment \((V_c)\) was obtained using the equation:

\[
V_c = \frac{Dose}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} Y_i}
\]  

[2]

The steady-state volume of distribution \((V_{ss})\) was obtained using the equation:

\[
V_{ss} = V_c \left(1 + \frac{k_{12} + k_{13}}{k_{21} k_{31}}\right)
\]  

[3]

where \(k_{12}, k_{21}, k_{13}, k_{31}\) represent the first-order distribution rate constants between compartment 1 and compartments 2 and 3 respectively.

The mean residence-time after iv administration \((MRT_{iv})\) was calculated using the equation:

\[
MRT = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{Y_i}{\lambda_i}}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{Y_i}{\lambda_i}} \quad [4]
\]

The blood clearance \((Cl)\) was calculated from the equation:

\[
Cl = \frac{Dose}{MRT_{iv}}
\]  

[5]

In equation [5], \(AUC_{iv}\) is the area under the blood concentration versus time curve after iv administration calculated by integrating equation [1].

The systemic availability \((F)\) and the rate constant of absorption \((K_a)\) were obtained by the method of semisimultaneous administrations (Wijnand, 1992). Estimates of \(F\) and \(K_a\) were found by fitting a tricompartmental multiple dosage model function to the data.

RESULTS

Diet composition

Diet composition and total mineral intake are shown in table I. Cadmium intake was less than 2 \(\mu g.kg^{-1}.d^{-1}\) and calcium and magnesium intakes were 15 and 2 g/d, respectively, throughout the experiment.

First study

Control blood cadmium concentrations were less than the limit of quantification of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Hay</th>
<th>Granulated food</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Total intake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protein (g/kg)</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>15.1 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphorus (g/kg)</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>8.0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium (g/kg)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>1.9 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnesium (g/kg)</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>283 mg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron (mg/kg)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>8.0 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper (mg/kg)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.0084</td>
<td>0.0976 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manganese (mg/kg)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc (mg/kg)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.0084</td>
<td>0.0976 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selenium (mg/kg)</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>0.18 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead (mg/kg)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadmium (mg/kg)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.0084</td>
<td>0.0976 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin D (Ul/kg)</td>
<td>700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pharmacokinetics of cadmium in ewes

The mean cadmium blood concentrations in 3 ewes after oral cadmium administrations of first 2 mg kg\(^{-1}\)d\(^{-1}\) for 16 d and then 0.3 mg kg\(^{-1}\)d\(^{-1}\) for 16 d.

These concentrations rose immediately after iv cadmium administration up to a maximum of 450 to 5 800 µg/l depending on the dose (fig 2). The blood concentrations then decreased very rapidly for 4–6 h and more slowly thereafter. The blood concentration–time profile after the repeated oral administrations of cadmium chloride is shown in figure 3 for each ewe. Blood cadmium concentrations rose during the first 21 d of administration to a plateau concentration during the following 19 d from 4.1 ± 0.3 µg/l to 7.8 ± 0.8 µg/l depending on the ewe).

According to Akaike’s information criterion, the disposition of cadmium in all ewes was better fitted by a triexponential equation corresponding to a 3-compartment open model. The individual pharmacokinetic parameters are listed in table II. The cadmium chloride systemic availability ranged

Second study

The blood cadmium concentrations in the control ewe were below the limit of quantification during the entire study.

The mean values of blood concentrations before cadmium iv administrations were also below the limit of quantification.
from 0.15 to 0.5%. The half-life of elimination was 101–151.5 d, the mean residence time following iv administration was 119–216 d and blood clearance was 0.122–0.161 l.d⁻¹.kg⁻¹.

### Table II. Pharmacokinetic parameters describing cadmium disposition in 3 ewes after oral and iv administration of cadmium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Ewe 9090</th>
<th>Ewe 9091</th>
<th>Ewe 9501</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$t_{1/2\alpha}$ (min)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t_{1/2\alpha}$ (min)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t_{1/2\beta}$ (d)</td>
<td>126.5</td>
<td>151.5</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$k_1$ (d⁻¹)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$k_3$ (d⁻¹)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t_{1/2}$ (min)</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$V_c$ (l/kg)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$V_{ss}$ (l/kg)</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI (l.d⁻¹.kg⁻¹)</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRT₁₀ (d)</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (%)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$t_{1/2\alpha}$ and $t_{1/2\beta}$ = distribution half-life; $t_{1/2\beta}$; $t_{1/2}$ $k_3$ = elimination and absorption half-lives respectively; $k_1$, $k_3$ = first-order-distribution constants; $V_c$ = volume of central compartment; $V_{ss}$ = steady-state volume of distribution; CI = blood clearance; MRT₁₀ = mean residence time calculated after a single iv administration; F = cadmium chloride systemic availability.

### Cadmium concentration in the tissues

Cadmium concentrations in the tissues were low (table III). The highest concentrations were found in the liver and kidneys of treated ewes: 5.9 ± 1.3 and 21.9 ± 1.8 mg/kg in the livers of the first and second experiment ewes, respectively; 6.5 ± 4 mg/kg and 56.7 ± 13.9 mg/kg in the kidneys of the first and second study ewes, respectively. The small intestine and abomasum cadmium concentrations were higher in treated than in control ewes. The cadmium muscle concentrations were low in all ewes, close to the control ewe values in the first experiment (0.03–0.04 mg/kg), and slightly higher in the second experiment (0.07–0.11 mg/kg).

### DISCUSSION

Ewes were selected as experimental animals as a good model for ruminants and a farm animal used for human consumption.

Several diet components are known to affect cadmium bioavailability, and so the composition of the diet was controlled. Protein, vitamin D, iron, zinc, copper or calcium deficiencies are known to increase gastrointestinal availability of cadmium (Hieta- nen, 1981) and manganese supplementa-
Pharmacokinetics of cadmium in ewes

Table III. Cadmium concentrations (mg/kg) in the wet tissues of the ewes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tissue</th>
<th>Ewe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9315 0880 0562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>4.4 6.5 6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>7.4 9.9 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle</td>
<td>0.03 0.04 0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abomasum</td>
<td>0.64 0.76 0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small intestine</td>
<td>0.80 0.73 0.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First study: after cadmium oral administrations of 2 mg kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for 16 d and then 0.3 mg kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for an additional 16 d. Second study: after cadmium iv administration of 0.033, 0.1, 0.33 mg/kg 21 months before and cadmium oral administration of 2 mg kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for 21 d and then 1 mg kg⁻¹.d⁻¹ for 50 d.

Cadmium is slowly eliminated (Miller, 1973; Van Bruwaene et al 1982; Robards and Worsfold, 1991), which means that the sampling periods and wash-out intervals are too long to determine all the kinetic parameters by classical methods. The semisimultaneous or sequential method (Wijnand, 1992) assume cadmium linearity and allow the estimation of all the kinetic parameters, even Fₜ, in less time than the classical methods.

In the present experiment, the gastrointestinal availability of CdCl₂ was found to
be low (0.15–0.5%). In dogs, a pharmacokinetic method gave a percentage of daily absorbed dose of 0.15–0.6% (Matsuno et al, 1991). Other approaches gave similar results with total body cadmium retention of 0.3–0.4% in goats (Miller et al, 1969), 0.09% in steers (Johnson et al, 1981), and 0.035–0.75% in dairy cows (Neathery et al, 1974; Van Bruwaene et al, 1982). The percentage of the cadmium dose absorbed in the in situ rat intestine loop was 0.09–1.8% (Goon and Klaassen, 1989). The pharmacokinetic approach is easier to carry out and gives similar results to the approaches requiring animal slaughter.

The half-life of cadmium absorption was 36–255 min. Although rather fast, this result agrees with another study, where an intestinal loop was infused in situ with CdCl₂ in rats and 30 min after incubation, cadmium was detected in liver (Ohta and Cherian, 1991).

In this experiment, the volume of the central compartment was approximately 0.06 l/kg, close to the 0.05 l/kg obtained in the rat (Frazier, 1980). According to Nordberg and Nordberg (1987) and our previous experiments (Han et al, 1994), cadmium in blood cells accumulates at much higher concentrations than in plasma. The central compartment, may therefore represent the blood cells, because the total blood volume in sheep is 0.066 l/kg (Swenson, 1977).

The steady-state volume of distribution of cadmium was large (17–35 l/kg), reflecting the slow return from the deep compartments to blood because cadmium is concentrated in certain tissues of these ewes. As previously described (Neathery et al, 1974), the highest concentrations of cadmium are found in the kidneys and liver; cadmium levels are far lower in the other tissues. In goats, 0.17 and 0.08% of the cadmium total dose given orally is retained, respectively, in the liver and the kidneys (Miller et al, 1969). Our preliminary study results are very similar (about 0.19% of the total dose in the liver and 0.08% in the kidneys). About 75–85% of the body cadmium is usually found in the liver and the kidneys of ruminants (Miller et al, 1969; Johnson et al, 1981). Because the liver and kidneys weighed 700 and 270 g respectively, and 80% of the body cadmium is usually found in liver and kidneys, about 6 (ewe 9315) to 9 (ewe 0880) mg cadmium was retained in the whole body of the first study ewes. The percentage of cadmium retained probably reached 0.3–0.4% of the dose. These results are similar to the cadmium availabilities calculated with a pharmacokinetic method in the second study (0.15–0.5%).

The cadmium amount absorbed in the second experiment by the ewes, calculated from the oral dose administrated and the availability estimated for each ewe, ranged from 11 to 28 mg. The cadmium amount actually retained in the body of these ewes was higher (26.8–35.8 mg). This suggests that a large fraction of the iv dose given 2 years before was still stored in the tissues. The liver and the kidneys can store large amounts of cadmium for a very long time.

### Table IV. Exposure time (d) necessary to reach cadmium blood concentration of 0.8 μg/l estimated with the kinetic parameters issued from the second study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral dosage (mg·kg⁻¹·d⁻¹)</th>
<th>Ewe 9090</th>
<th>Ewe 9091</th>
<th>Ewe 9501</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Never: the oral dosage is too low to reach cadmium blood concentration of 0.8 μg/l.
Cadmium clearance was low (0.12–0.16 l.kg\(^{-1}\).d\(^{-1}\)) and reached approximately 0.13–0.17% of the cardiac output. This low blood clearance reflects the inability to eliminate cadmium accumulated in blood cells since only the low concentrations of cadmium in plasma are available for elimination.

The mean residence time following iv administration was 119–216 d. The half-life of elimination was 100–150 d. This long elimination half-life is a result of the large volume of distribution and slow elimination of cadmium. In dogs, the half-life of elimination based on a two-compartment open model was 100–700 d (Matsuno et al., 1991). Nevertheless, our elimination half-life is rapid compared to biological half-lives of 30 years in human (Kjellström cited in Robards and Worsfold, 1991) or compared to the half-life in renal tissue of 10–33 years (Tsuschiya and Kjellström cited in Task Group, 1973; Bernard cited in Robards and Worsfold, 1991). Our parameter, calculated from blood concentration data, reflects the overall elimination process and does not reflect the half-life of a given tissue such as the kidney. Blood half-life values may reflect more recent exposures than kidney values (Task Group, 1973).

According to our kinetic parameters, cadmium blood concentrations in ewes exposed to a mean pollution consumption of 0.3 mg.kg\(^{-1}\).d\(^{-1}\) would increase for 1.5–2 years (5 times the half-life of elimination), then reach a plateau concentration of 6.2 ± 2.9 μg/l. The blood concentration would be quantifiable after 17 ± 5 d of exposure. When the exposure to cadmium pollution stops, blood concentrations would remain quantifiable for 360 ± 180 d and detectable for 540 ± 215 d. The exposure time necessary to reach quantifiable concentrations in blood for different pollution levels are shown in table IV. Blood values may reflect long exposure to low pollution levels (0.2 mg.kg\(^{-1}\).d\(^{-1}\) for more than a month) or high pollution levels. With our analytical method, blood concentrations could not detect pollution levels exposure below 30 μg.kg\(^{-1}\).d\(^{-1}\).

Our experiment is the first to calculate pharmacokinetic parameters for cadmium after oral administration to non-lactating ewes. We found low cadmium availability, a large volume of distribution and accumulation of cadmium in certain tissues (liver and kidney) which explains the low elimination rate. Future studies could result in methods to decrease cadmium availability and tissue accumulation to reduce the contribution of cadmium in animal tissues to the consumer diet.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The experiment is part of an INRA research program on the theme of cadmium circulation in some agro-systems. We thank PL Toutain for his contribution to the pharmacokinetic analysis of the results and O Matray for his participation.

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