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Glucose-based spiro-oxathiazoles as in vivo anti-hyperglycemic agents through glycogen phosphorylase inhibition

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The design of glycogen phosphorylase (GP) inhibitors targeting the catalytic site of the enzyme is a promising strategy for a better control of hyperglycaemia in the context of type 2 diabetes. Glucopryanosylidene-spiro-heterocycles have been demonstrated as potent GP inhibitors, and more specifically spiro-oxathiazoles. A new synthetic route has now been elaborated through 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition of an aryl nitrile oxide to a glucono-thionolactone affording in one step the spiro-oxathioazole moiety. The thionolactone was obtained from the thermal rearrangement of a thiosulfinate precursor according to Fairbanks’ protocols, although with a revisited outcome and also rationalised with DFT calculations. The 2-naphthyl substituted glucose-based spiro-oxathiazole Sh, identified as one of the most potent GP inhibitors (K = 160 nM against RMGPb) could be produced on the gram-scale from this strategy. Further evaluation in vitro using rat and human hepatocytes demonstrated that compound Sh is a druggable anti-hyperglycaemic compound performing slightly better than DAB used as a positive control. Investigation in Zucker fa/fa rat model in acute and subchronic assays further confirmed the potency of compound Sh since it lowered blood glucose levels by ~36% at 30 mg/kg and ~43% at 60 mg/kg. The present study is one of the few in vivo investigations for glucose-based GP inhibitors and provides data in animal models for such drug candidates.

Introduction

Diabetes mellitus is one of the most severe global health problems of the 21st century. According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) 425 million people, ~9% of the adult population suffer from this disease, many of them may even remain undiagnosed. The number of diabetic patients is predicted to reach close to 700 million by 2045 with the most significant increase in low and medium income territories of Asia, Africa and South-America. In 2017 USD ~727 billion was spent for diabetes treatments representing more than 12% of the global health expenditures. Most of the diabetic patients (>90%) belong to the so-called type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) when the organism does not produce insulin in sufficient quantities and/or the peripheral cells are more or less resistant to the insulin action to promote uptake of blood glucose. Due to the constantly high levels of glycaemia, short and especially long term complications are developed being frequent causes of death, thereby diabetes is one of the main contributors to global mortality. At present no causal therapy is known, treatment regimens aim at maintaining blood sugar levels around the normoglycemic value of ~6.1 mM by applying various medications.

Hepatic glucose output is elevated in T2DM patients. This glucose production consists of glycogenolytic and gluconeogenic components and the latter is known to be cycled through the glycogen pool. Therefore, liver glycogen phosphorylase, the rate limiting enzyme of glycogen degradation has become a validated target to find potential new therapeutical possibilities against T2DM.

A broad variety of synthetic compounds and natural products have been tested as inhibitors of glycogen phosphorylase (GP) mainly with the most easily available rabbit muscle GPb (RMGPb). Many of these compounds’ complexes with the GP enzyme were also studied by X-ray crystallography. From the so discovered seven GP binding sites the most investigated one is the catalytic (or active) site which can accommodate D-glucose (the physiological inhibitor of the enzyme) and a large array of glucose derivatives. The most
efficient glucose derived inhibitors belong to three main compound categories: glucopyranosylidene-spiro-heterocycles, \textsuperscript{14,17} N-acyl-N'-β-glucopyranosyl ureas, \textsuperscript{14,15} and C-β-δ-glucopyranosyl heterocycles. In each category several inhibitors have submicromolar and even low nanomolar inhibitor constants. Some of these glucose analog GP inhibitors (GPIs) were subjected to various physiological investigations to show significant blood sugar diminishing effects in streptozotocin-induced diabetic rats,\textsuperscript{27} restoration of whole body insulin sensitivity,\textsuperscript{28} triggering of mitochondrial oxidation and mTORC2 (mammalian target of rapamycin complex 2) signaling,\textsuperscript{29} and improvement of pancreatic β-cell function.\textsuperscript{30}

Among the anomeric spirowcycles the most efficient inhibitors are the glucopyranosylidene-spiro-isoxazolines,\textsuperscript{31,32} (K = 0.63 µM against RMGP6 for a 2-naphthyl derivative) and the glucopyranosylidene-spiro-oxathiazoles,\textsuperscript{33} (K = 0.16 µM against RMGP6 for a 2-naphthyl derivative) while their xylopyranosylidene counterparts remained inactive.\textsuperscript{34} The glucose derived isoxazolines were shown to have significant inhibitory effects in rat and human hepatocytes, and also diminished hepatic glucose production in Zucker fa/fa rats by single dose oral administration.\textsuperscript{35} In this paper a new synthesis of the glucopyranosylidene-spiro-oxathiazoles, their \textit{in vitro} enzymatic evaluation, as well as cellular and \textit{in vivo} evaluations of the best inhibitor as an antihyperglycaemic agent are described.

**Synthesis**

Our previously explored strategy\textsuperscript{36} was developed for the synthesis of glycosylidene-spiro-oxathiazoles. The key step was the oxidative spirocyclization of \textit{O}-peracetylated glycosyl hydroximothioates\textsuperscript{37} (e.g. 2) to glycosylidene-spiro-oxathiazoles 3 and 4 (Scheme 1), a transformation achieved readily upon treatment with NBS in refluxing halogenated solvents (CCl\textsubscript{4}, CHCl\textsubscript{3}). When the hydroximothioate moiety displayed an aryl substituent, our earlier study showed that the cyclization proceeded well whatever the configuration of the pyranose ring (α-gluco, β-galacto) or that of the anomic centre (α/β). Moreover, the cyclization was stereoselective, yielding preferentially 1S-spiro-oxathiazoles in the D-glucopyranosyl, D-galactopyranosyl series. Later on, this methodology was applied for preparing D-glucopyranosyl, D-galactopyranosyl analogues. In this last series, the cyclization was shown to occur with the opposite stereoselectivity, thus favouring formation of the 1R-configured spiro-oxathiazoles. The compounds studied in more details displayed the aromatic pharmacophores a-i (Scheme 1).\textsuperscript{33,38} For the first step of the sequence, earlier studies\textsuperscript{37} showed that, under basic conditions, 2,3,4,6-tetra-O-acyl-1-thio-β-δ-glucopyranose 1 reacted readily with hydroximoyl chlorides to afford the corresponding glucopyranosyl hydroximothioates 2. For improving access to glucosinosalates,\textsuperscript{39} a procedure involving the \textit{in situ} formation of an oximoyl chloride from the oxime using inexpensive bleach, which is then reacted directly under basic conditions with thioglycopyranose has been reported. However, comparison of these procedures showed that the conventional method to hydroximothioates resulted in higher yields.\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, the two-step conventional method has been used to prepare new analogs in the present work (Ar = p-CO\textsubscript{2}H,C\textsubscript{6}H\textsubscript{4}, 2-quinoilinyl, 9-phenanthryl) with either hydrogen bond donors or acceptors or expanded aromatic moieties for better interactions of the aglycons in the β-pocket of the enzyme’s catalytic site.
**Table 1:** Stereoselective cyclization of β-D-glucosyl thiohydroximates 2 to glucose-based spiro-oxathiazoles 3-4 and their deacetylation to S₂.13,17-18

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>&gt;95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Yields were calculated based on the isolated yields and on the amount of product present in the 1R/-mixtures (ratio measured by ¹H NMR) unresolved by column chromatography.

**A new route to spiro-oxathiazoles by 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition of nitrile oxides to gluconothionolactone**

The design of a new access to spiro-oxathiazoles was inspired by our reported synthesis of glycossyldiene-spiro-isoaxazolines based on 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition of nitrile oxides to exomethylene glycols (pyranoid exo-glucals).31, 32, 35 Concerted reactions are advantageous as regard to atom economy, experimental conditions and yield, so they are of particular interest in carbohydrate chemistry. We and others could demonstrate that such cycloadditions occurred with a high stereocontrol, the dipole attacking the exo-methylene carbonyl from the α-face of the β-glucopyranosylidene ring, while for steric and electronic reasons, regioselectivity was equally high, favouring attack of the anomic carbon by the oxygen atom of nitrile oxides in all cases studied. The more complex cycloaddition of nitrones (E and/or Z configurations, endo and/or exo transition states) to pyranoid exo-glycols led to mixtures of cis/trans and α/β products, but the α-face approach usually predominated, or was even exclusive in some cases.41, 42

Based on this 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition analogy, the known β-glucono-δ-thionolactone 12 was43,45 appeared as the required precursor towards spiro-oxathiazoles. Moreover, benzylated β-glucono-δ-thionolactone 12 appeared to be a readily accessible substrate, based on the one-pot two-step synthetic route by the group of Fairbanks.46, 47 1-Thiosugars reacting with tert-butyl-sulfinyl chloride in the presence of triethylamine were converted into glycosyl S-tert-butyl thiosulfimates (within 10 min at room temperature), which upon thermolysis (10-20 min in refluxing toluene) yielded various glycothionolactones, and in particular β-glucono-δ-thionolactone 12 in a notable 85% yield.47 Glyco-δ-thionolactones have been shown to react with dienes, diazoalkanes, and carbene,48 and the thermolysis of the obtained dihydro-1,2,3-, and -1,3,4-thiadiazoles has been investigated.49

We developed this new route for synthesizing compound 5h on the multi-gram scale considering its remarkable inhibitory properties. The direct synthesis of dithiocarbonate 8 from the commercially available hemiacetal 6 using tosyl chloride and potassium O-ethyl dithiocarbonate under phase-transfer conditions50 gave in our hands poor results. However, the two-step protocol in one-pot reported by Vasella51 (treatment of hemiacetal 6 with CCl₄ and HMPT, then with potassium O-ethyl dithiocarbonate at ~40°C, for which basic conditions dictate the choice of base-stable protective groups) afforded the desired dithiocarbonate 8 via the intermediate chloride 7 (Scheme 2). Subsequent methanolation delivered the 2,3,4,6-tetra-O-benzyl-1-thio-β-glucopyranose 9 in an 85% overall yield. Thiol 9 was reacted with tert-butyl-sulfinyl chloride47 to afford the β-configured thiosulfinate 10 in 90% yield as a ∼1:1 S(S),S(R) diastereoisomeric mixture. While mass spectrometry displayed a main peak as expected (m/z = 661 [M+H]+), the formed diastereoisomers 10 were visible as two close spots on TLC plates. They were purified by column chromatography but could not be fully separated in pure form. The ¹H NMR spectra of this mixture displayed two singlets for the diastereotopic tert-butyl groups resonating at 1.40 and 1.58 ppm, respectively.

**Scheme 2. New access to 12-glucopyranosylidene-spiro-oxathiazole by nitrile oxide-thionolactone 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition**

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Following Fairbanks’ procedure, thermal elimination was carried out in refluxing toluene with either the crude thiosulfinate \( 10 \) (two-step one-pot process) or the purified diastereoisomeric mixture, but disappointingly, the yields recorded for the thionolactone \( 12 \) were around 45%, significantly lower than the 85% yield reported.\(^{47}\) As a byproduct, the glucono-\(\delta\)-lactone \( 11 \) was identified and actually isolated in an equal amount when the reaction time was increased thus allowing for the complete conversion of both thiosulfinate diastereoisomers.\(^{10}\) Formation of an undesired analogous \(\delta\)-lactone was observed by Fairbanks (~20% yield) during the thermal elimination at 120°C of a \(\alpha\)-rhamno-configured thiosulfinate.\(^{46}\) Presence of di-tert-butylthiosulfinate as a byproduct (vide infra, text and Fig. 3, Fig. 4) has been noted as another limitation of the method.\(^{47}\) These disappointing and intriguing observations led to repeated trials for enhancing the yield of thiolactone \( 12 \), but without success. TLC monitoring of the reaction revealed that the more mobile thiosulfinate diastereoisomer \( 10 \) was converted faster than the other one, and while its spot decreased visually on TLC plates, that of the thionolactone \( 12 \) increased. Seemingly, after complete conversion of the more reactive thiosulfinate, there was no increase in the amount of \(\alpha\)-gluco-no-\(\delta\)-thionolactone \( 12 \) from the qualitative analysis of TLC, and disappointingly, the isolated yields never exceeded 45%. Analysis of MS data collected for the fractions recovered from column chromatography confirmed the formation of \(\alpha\)-glucono-\(\delta\)-thionolactone \( 12 \) as overestimated, as from the report, it corresponded to a crude product «contaminated with tert-butyl species, possibly di-tert-butyl thiosulfinate. Yields projected to approximately 54-56%». Presence of byproducts, allegedly mixed disulfides or disproportionation products, was also supposed, but not proven. A note clearly stated that the yield estimated by \(\delta\)-H NMR for the thionolactone \( 12 \) were 54 and 56% (close to the 43-53% yields observed in the \(\alpha\)-galacto series),\(^ {47}\) so that these data corroborated ours, suggesting the occurrence of at least one unwanted reaction detrimental to the yield of the desired glycono-thionolactone.

D-Glycino-thionolactones are subject to epimerization\(^{47}\) at C-2 or 2,3-elimination\(^{43}\) under basic conditions. Therefore, D-glucono-\(\alpha\)-thionolactone \( 12 \) was often used without further purification for the 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition. With the crude thionolactone \( 12 \), this step proceeded smoothly in the presence of 2-naphthyl hydroximoyl chloride to afford the spiro-oxathiazole \( 13 \) in high yield (~95%) and stereoselectivity (9:1 S/R mixture). The diastereoisomeric mixture could be resolved by silica gel column chromatography to afford the desired spiro-oxathiazole \( 13 \) with a S-configuration at the spiro-anomeric center (85% isolated yield) and the minor R-epimer (<10% yield).

Not surprisingly, the final debenzylated step proved to be problematic, and standard hydrogenolysis in the presence of palladium did not proceed at all, while \(\text{Et}_3\text{SiH/}H_2\) resulted in partial deprotection only. Treatments with bromine or NBS and water under various free radical conditions (NBS, \(\text{Cl}_2\text{I} \), hv, with or without \(\text{CaCO}_3\): \(\text{NaBrO}_2/\text{Na}_2\text{S}_2\text{O}_3\)) resulted in complex mixtures, due to partial debenzylations,\(^ {53, 54}\) and/or formation of oxidized products as evidenced by mass spectrometry: in addition to the expected fragments corresponding to the partial or total debenzylation, fragments corresponding to \(M+14\) indicated the oxidation of benzylic to benzoates, while others \((M+16\) and \(M+32\)) suggested oxidation to sulfones and sulfones. Fortunately, debenzylation could be achieved by treatment with \(\text{BCl}_3\) at \(-60^\circ\text{C}\)\(^ {55}\) with careful TLC monitoring to quench the reaction immediately after disappearance of the starting material to avoid further unwanted reactions.

Purification by column chromatography delivered the desired final \(O\)-unprotected spiro-oxathiazole \( 5h \) (815 mg, 65% yield). In conclusion, the designed 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition approach to 2-naphthyl nitrile oxide and perbenzylated \(\alpha\)-gluco-thionolactone \( 12 \) was most efficient for synthesizing the corresponding \(\alpha\)-glucose-based 1S-3-(2-naphthyl)-spiro-1,4,2-oxathiazole \( 13 \). Both regio-, and stereo-selectivities were excellent. In contrast to literature reports, the limiting step of this approach was the synthesis of tetra-\(\alpha\)-benzyl \(\alpha\)-gluco-\(\delta\)-thionolactone \( 12 \) by thermolysis of glucopyranosyl tert-butyl sulfinate precursors \( 10 \). The discrepancies between our results and those of Fairbanks as reported and detailed in an internal document prompted the investigation of the thermolysis mechanism by DFT calculations to better understand the possible path to the desired thionolactone.

**Proposed mechanisms for the thermal elimination of thiosulfinates \( 10 \) to thionolactone \( 12 \)**

Various possible modes of reaction were envisaged (Scheme 3) since tert-butyl thiosulfinates may undergo thermal elimination by hydrogen atom abstraction through five-membered cyclic transition states (TS). Glycino-thionolactones being reportedly obtained sometimes in excellent yields,\(^ {46, 47}\) elimination involving the anomeric proton (path \( a \)) was privileged (anomeric effect), thus delivering the desired thionolactone \( 12 \) and tert-butyl sulfenic acid. However, elimination might also involve one of the nine equivalent hydrogen atoms of the tert-butyl moiety (path \( b \)), which would afford isobutene and the 3-D-glucopyranosyl-thiosulfoxyl acid \( 14 \)\(^ {56}\) (other name: 3-D-glucopyranosyl-1-oxa-trisulfane). Considering early\(^ {56}\) and recent\(^ {57, 58}\) reports on the thermolysis of di-tert-butylthiosulfinate (also termed di-tert-butyl disulfane-S-oxide, \(\text{tBuS(O)StBu}\))\(^ {57}\), these speculations were reasonable, but the total weight of lactones \( 11 \) and \( 12 \) (ca 90%, 1:1 ratio) measured after full conversion of both thiosulfinates indicated that path \( b \) was only a marginal process.
The puzzling formation of α-glucolactone 11 might be due to hydrolysis by water present in trace amount or to adventitious reactions, as discussed recently, but since 11 was detected on TLC plates even at the initial stage of the reaction, and as use of a pure mixture of diastereomeric thiosulfinites 10 led to similar lactone distribution, this hypothesis was uncertain. As the glucopyranosyl tert-butyl thiosulfinites 10 must achieve a favourable 5-membered cyclic TS for the thermal elimination to proceed, and because of probable steric clashes between the tert-butyl group and the 2-O-benzyl group for the S(S)-diastereoisomer, most probably the S(R)- and S(S)-tert-butyl thiosulfinites underwent elimination at different rates, the (R)-diastereoisomer reacting faster to deliver thionolactone 12 through path a. Still, another hypothesis was needed to explain the presence of glucolactone 11. The thermal rearrangement of α-configured glucopyranosyl xanthates to α-glycosyl dithiocarbonates has been reported to proceed without inversion of configuration at moderate temperatures (50-65°C). This reported example of the Friedenreich-Schönberg rearrangement was supposed to occur by an intramolecular 1,3-shift through a 4-membered cyclic TS. An analogous thermal rearrangement could occur with the less reactive S(S) thiosulfinate (path c), and the rearranged product with a O-glycosidic bond (OS(S) moiety) would be susceptible to afford by thermal elimination the lactone 11 and tert-butyl-thiosulfenic acid ([BuSSH]. Interestingly, the relative enthalpies for thiosulfinic acid isomers [HS(O)SH, and HS(S)OH] estimated by theoretical studies at 298 K in the gas phase were found to be almost the same, suggesting that isomers 10 and 10’ might have similar energies. While the rearrangement of xanthates to dithiocarbonates is stability driven, the proposed pathway to glucolactone 11 might benefit from the activation of the anomeric center (rearrangement favoured) and, in lactone 11, the stabilization of C=O bond (162 kcal.mol⁻¹) by ca. 50 kcal.mol⁻¹ compared to the C=S thiocarbonyl bond (115 kcal.mol⁻¹) in thionolactone 12. Eventually, calculations were carried out to identify the reaction pathway leading to the glucolactone byproduct (hydrolysis versus thermal rearrangement followed by elimination).

**DFT Calculations**

As a representative model, the tetra-O-methyl analog of 10 was chosen (See supporting information for further details) to have reasonable computational time. The numbering of molecules applied is the same for both O-benzyl- (synthetic work) and O-methyl-protected (computational approach) analogues, but using italicized types in the last case.

Our calculations addressed first the three reaction pathways mentioned above (Scheme 3), namely the two possible direct internal eliminations (EI) (path a, path b), then path c, in which an internal O,S-rearrangement by 1,3-shift was supposed to occur prior to the EI elimination. The stereochemistry at the sulfur atom did not influence the calculations and the results are presented here for a single diastereoisomer at the sulfur atom.

Starting from 10, the two divergent internal eliminations (EI) discussed above were envisaged (Fig. 1). Deprotonation of the anemic position (path a) was found to be easy (TS-a, ΔG° = 21.2 kcal.mol⁻¹), leading to the D-glucono-δ-thionolactone 12 and formation of tert-butil sulfenic acid. In the case of path b, which involves one of the nine hydrogen atoms of the tert-butyl groups, and leads to product 14 and isobutene, a higher activation barrier of ΔG° = 24.9 kcal.mol⁻¹ (TS-b) was calculated. This is in agreement with the synthetic work, as the thermal δ-elimination delivered the thionolactone 12 in moderate yield while the benzyl-protected product 14 was not observed.

As a possibility for the puzzling formation of 11 from 10, path c was envisioned (Fig. 2). For this two-step pathway, a 1,3 shift of the tert-butil thiosulfinate group led first to 10’ (TS-c, ΔG° = 36.3 kcal.mol⁻¹), which subsequently could react through an EI elimination (TS-d, ΔG° = 10.9 kcal.mol⁻¹) leading to 11 and tert-butil thiosulfenic acid. Due to the high activation energy of TS-c, this pathway can thus be excluded.
At this point, since the formation of the experimentally observed d-glucono lactone 11 cannot be explained through path c, we wondered whether lactone 11 could be formed due to hydrolysis of d-glucono-thionolactone 12. In this event, since the reaction was conducted under anhydrous conditions, water had to be formed as the reaction proceeded. Interestingly, Block et al.\textsuperscript{50} reported the dismutation of tert-butyl sulfenic acid, giving rise to tert-butyl-2-methyl-propane-2-sulfinothioate (or thiosulfinate) and water (0.5 eq. each, Fig. 3). The computed thermodynamics for the dismutation ($\Delta G = -4.4$ kcal mol$^{-1}$) were in agreement with the experimental observations of Block.\textsuperscript{50} Subsequently, water, assisted by the coordination of the thiosulfinate, can trigger the hydrolysis of compound 12 through TS-e ($\Delta G^\circ = 30.6$ kcal mol$^{-1}$), providing glucono lactone 11 and hydrogen sulfide (0.5 eq. each). This proposed mechanism is in agreement with the experimental formation of lactones 11 and 12 in a 1:1 ratio.

To further confirm that lactone 11 came from the hydrolysis of thionolactone 12 (Fig. 4), we computed the attack of di-tert-butyl thiosulfinate on substrate 12 (Fig. 4). TS-f ($\Delta G^\circ = 41.5$ kcal mol$^{-1}$) could lead indeed to the formation of 11 and tert-butyl-2-methylpropane-2-sulfinothioate (or dithiosulfinate) without the assistance of a water molecule. Since the $\Delta G^\circ$ between TS-e and TS-f was 10.9 kcal mol$^{-1}$ in favor of the former, water hydrolysis pathway was confirmed to be the most energetically reasonable route.

In summary, these calculations showed a good agreement with the synthetic results, as they indicated that the thermal elimination via 5-membered transition states preferentially involved the anomeric proton rather than one of the nine tert-butyl hydrogen atoms, thus yielding the target gluconothionolactone. Simultaneous formation of glucono lactone through a 1,3-shift of the thiosulfinate moiety, followed by Ei elimination, is not possible. Based on the reported dismutation of tert-butyl sulfenic acid which yielded di-tert-butyl thiosulfinate and water (0.5 eq. each), the calculations predicted that 12 can be hydrolysed into 11 (0.5 eq.). Thus, in order to optimize the yield of the target gluconothionolactone 12, water, formed while the thermal elimination proceeds, has to be trapped by efficient means, for example by adding activated molecular sieves to the reaction medium.\textsuperscript{46, 47}

**Enzyme kinetics**

Previous structure-activity relationship studies\textsuperscript{15, 33, 38} revealed that phenyl oxathiazole 5a was a moderate inhibitor of GP ($K_I = 26 \mu M$). Other para-substituted phenyl analogues (R = phenyl, NO$_2$, CN) exhibited lower inhibitory properties with IC$_{50}$ values in the high micromolar range for 5b,c,g. The para-fluoro and para-methoxy analogues 5d and 5e had similar and slightly better inhibitory potential than 5a ($K_I = 28$ and 8 $\mu M$, respectively). As observed for several other classes of glucose-based GP inhibitors,\textsuperscript{14, 15, 32, 35, 68} the 2-naphthyl oxathiazole derivative 5h was the best inhibitor among the series of compounds studied, and one of the best among glucose-based GP inhibitors. Substitution by a para-carboxy group on the phenyl (5j) resulted in a good inhibitory potency ($K_I = 238 \mu M$), while the 2-quinolinyl analogue 5k was more potent ($K_I = 26 \mu M$), although much less potent than the 2-naphthyl analogue 5h. In spite of the size of the 9-phenanthryl residue, compound 5l displayed moderate inhibitory properties.
**Table 2**: Kinetic data measured for spiro-oxathiazoles 5a-e,g,h,i,j for the inhibition of RMGPb

<table>
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<td>5h</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Structure" /></td>
<td>K_i = 238.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5j</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Structure" /></td>
<td>K_i = 26.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5k</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Structure" /></td>
<td>IC₅₀ = 32.4 ±1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In vitro pharmacological evaluations**

Guided by the kinetic results and for an in depth evaluation of his inhibitory property, the glucose-based GP inhibitor 5h with the best K_i value was assayed in vitro with rat and human hepatocytes in primary culture (see Table S1). The potent in vitro GP inhibitor 1,4-dideoxy-1,4-imino-b-arabinitol (DAB, K_i = 400 nM)³³ was selected as the reference compound for its established in vivo activity in a GP-dependent glycaemia study.³³ An evaluation of glucose release after glucagon stimulation in primary rat hepatocytes was performed. Further evaluation in human hepatocytes for the candidate 5h was accomplished by measuring both glucose release and intracellular glycogen for an assessment of species specificity.

IC₅₀ Values calculated for glucose release (product of GP-mediated glycogen depolymerisation) or intracellular glycogen content (substrate of GP-mediated glycogen depolymerisation) are similar (2-5 µM, Table 3) in human hepatocytes. In the studied cellular model, this result demonstrates that compound 5h affected glycogenolysis via GP inhibition.

**Table 3**: in vitro IC₅₀ for compound 5h based on glucose release and intracellular glycogen content after glucagon stimulation in rat and human primary hepatocytes in primary cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound</th>
<th>Glucose release IC₅₀ (µM)</th>
<th>Intracellular glycogen IC₅₀ (µM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rats</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5h</td>
<td>6.7 ± 2.08 ± 1.51</td>
<td>4.88 ± 1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAB</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.17 ± 1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³³ IC₅₀ values are average triplicate measurements for three human hepatocyte cultures (see supporting information).

The concentration-response curves obtained for glucose release (Fig. 5) and observed intracellular glycogen content (Fig. 6) provided a basis for a comparison against DAB. Compound 5h performed slightly better than DAB in terms of concentrations to obtain 50% inhibition on glucose release in rat and human hepatocytes. Such concentrations are compatible with potential pharmacological applications.

![Figure 5: Glucose release from rat and human hepatocytes after glucagon stimulation](image)

![Figure 6: Intracellular glycogen content](image)
**In vivo pharmacological evaluations**

The glucagon challenge test in the Zucker fa/fa rat model was performed to measure the glucose-lowering effect *in vivo* with for compound 5h. This animal model, displaying hyperphagia and insulin resistance with hyperinsulinemia, was chosen due to its high hepatic glycogen content. We used glucagon (200 µg/kg, in a single subcutaneous “SC” administration) as hyperglycemic agent. A dose-dependent effect was clearly observed when compound 5h was introduced orally in a single administration (Figure 7).

Liver glucose output kinetics (Fig. 7A) and their areas under the curves (AUC) for 45 min (Fig. 7B) pointed to a dose-dependent decrease in liver glucose production ranging from 7.5 to 60 mg/kg (Fig. 7B). The rate of endogenous glucose production being elevated in type 2 diabetes renders this effect on liver output relevant for therapeutic applications. Compound 5h was then selected for a subchronic oral administration with a dose corresponding to the first significantly effective in the acute *in vivo* glucagon challenge test (30 mg/kg). In a glucagon challenge test performed after 4 days of treatment, a nearly 33% reduction of hepatic glucose production (p<0.05) was observed (Fig. 8A-B). It is worth pointing out that the activity of glycogen phosphorylase was preserved, in spite of the subchronic treatment, since hepatic glucose production was not further reduced.

As a summary, the *in vitro* and *in vivo* pharmacological effects of glucose-based spiro-oxathiazole 5h were analyzed and they validated its potent GP inhibition both *in vitro*, in cell assays and in a diabetic rat model (*in vivo*). In rat and human hepatocytes, compound 5h reduced glucagon-stimulated glucose output through glycogenolysis inhibition (Table 3, Fig.)
5). No species specificity could be observed since the potency of compound 5h for inhibition of glucose output were comparable between rat and human cells (Table 3) as previously reported.72, 73 Compound 5h was efficient in vivo in the Zucker fa/fa rat model of insulin resistance and a dose-dependent decrease of hepatic glucose output to a maximal 43% was observed (Fig. 7). This glucose lowering effect allows for the design of therapeutic applications due to a high rate of endogenous glucose production in type 2 diabetes.71 Indeed, hepatic glucose production tends to match the values usually obtained in Wistar normal rat. The complete suppression of glucagon-induced glucose output in the presence of DAB appears in sharp contrast with the moderate level of inhibition of GP.70 The incomplete inhibition of GP by compound 5h is advantageous for limiting potential side effects. In addition, the absence tissue-specificity between liver and muscle GP isoforms could impair exercise-mediated metabolism of muscle glycogen. Preserving a minimum level of activity will limit this risk, although the selection of a liver-specific inhibitor preferred for long-term therapy remains a valuable research challenge.74 Even though hypoglycaemia could be a detrimental consequence of GP inhibition, hepatic glucose production was not further reduced after repeated administrations of compound 5h, indicating a residual activity of GP thus limiting the risk of hypoglycaemia (Fig. 7).

Conclusion

Type 2 diabetes is a major public health problem and design of glycogen phosphorylase inhibitors targeting the catalytic site of the enzyme appears as a promising strategy for a better control of hyperglycaemia. An especially potent group of GP inhibitors is represented by some glucopyranosylidene-spiro-heterocycles, among them spiro-oxathiazoles. A new synthesis has now been elaborated for this valuable class of compounds by the 1,3-dipolar cycloaddition of an aryl nitrile oxide to a glucono-thionolactone affording in one step the spiro-oxathiazole moiety. The thionolactone was obtained from the thermal rearrangement of a thiosulfinate precursor according to Fairbanks’ protocols, although with a revisited outcome and also based on DFT calculations. The 2-naphthyl substituted glucose-based spiro-oxathiazole 5h has recently been identified as one of the most potent GP inhibitors with a Kᵢ of 160 nM against RMGPb. Further evaluation in vitro using rat and human hepatocytes demonstrated that compound 5h was promising as a potential anti-hyperglycaemic druggable compound as it performed better than DAB used as a positive control. Investigation in Zucker fa/fa rat model in acute and subchronic assays further confirmed the potency of compound 5h since it lowered blood glucose levels by ~36% at 30 mg/kg and ~43% at 60 mg/kg. This indicates that compound 5h can be considered as a powerful anti-hyperglycaemic agent in the context of type 2 diabetes. The present study is one of the few in vivo investigations for glucose-based GP inhibitors and provides data in animal models for such drug candidates. This study is also an example of molecular diversity-oriented strategies to identify the fittest inhibitor of GP and from the identification of this candidate, multigram-scale preparations for in vivo validation called for a robust and faster synthetic route to the target glucose-based spiro-oxathiazole.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare

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Notes and references