

Deletion of ARNT/HIF1 β in pancreatic beta cells does not impair glucose homeostasis in mice, but is associated with defective glucose sensing ex vivo

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Abstract

Aims/hypothesis It has been suggested that the transcription factor ARNT/HIF1 β is critical for maintaining in vivo glucose homeostasis and pancreatic beta cell glucose-stimulated insulin secretion (GSIS). Our goal was to gain more insights into the metabolic defects seen after the loss of ARNT/HIF1 β in beta cells.

Methods The in vivo and in vitro consequences of the loss of ARNT/HIF1 β were investigated in beta cell specific *Arnt/Hif1 β* knockout mice (β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} mice).

Results The only in vivo defects found in β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} mice were significant increases in the respiratory exchange ratio and in vivo carbohydrate oxidation, and a decrease in lipid oxidation. The mitochondrial oxygen consumption rate was unaltered in mouse β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} islets upon glucose stimulation. β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} islets had an impairment in the glucose-stimulated increase in Ca²⁺ signalling and a reduced insulin secretory response to glucose in the presence of KCl and

diazoxide. The glucose-stimulated increase in the NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio was reduced in β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} islets. The reduced GSIS and NADPH/NADP⁺ levels in β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} islets could be rescued by treatment with membrane-permeable tricarboxylic acid intermediates. Small interfering (si)RNA mediated knockdown of ARNT/HIF1 β in human islets also inhibited GSIS. These results suggest that the regulation of GSIS by the K_{ATP} channel-dependent and -independent pathways is affected by the loss of ARNT/HIF1 β in islets.

Conclusions/interpretation This study provides three new insights into the role of ARNT/HIF1 β in beta cells: (1) ARNT/HIF1 β deletion in mice impairs GSIS ex vivo; (2) β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} mice have an increased respiratory exchange ratio; and (3) ARNT/HIF1 β is required for GSIS in human islets.

Keywords ARNT/HIF1 β · Insulin release · Metabolism · Pancreatic beta cell

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Abbreviations

ARNT/	Aryl hydrocarbon receptor nuclear translocator/
HIF1 β	hypoxia inducible factor-1 β
ChREBP	Carbohydrate-responsive element-binding protein
DM α KG	Dimethyl α -ketoglutarate
DMM	Dimethylmalate
DNP	2,4-Dinitrophenol
GSIS	Glucose-stimulated insulin secretion
hGH	Human growth hormone
IPGTT	Intraperitoneal GTT
ITT	Insulin tolerance test
MMP	Mitochondrial membrane potential

OCR	Oxygen consumption rate
RER	Respiratory exchange ratio
siRNA	Small interfering RNA
TCA	Tricarboxylic acid
$\dot{V}\text{CO}_2$	Volume of carbon dioxide produced
$\dot{V}\text{O}_2$	Volume of oxygen consumed

Introduction

The transcription factor aryl hydrocarbon receptor nuclear translocator/hypoxia inducible factor-1 β (ARNT/HIF1 β) is important for a wide range of cellular functions, including the response to hypoxia, angiogenesis, placental development, and metabolism of xenobiotics [1]. It has also been suggested that ARNT/HIF1 β might play a role in the pathogenesis of type 2 diabetes, in part because it has been identified as being required for maintaining beta cell function. ARNT/HIF1 β has been found to be reduced by 90% in human type 2 diabetic islets, and is necessary to maintain normal in vivo glucose homeostasis and insulin secretion in mice [2].

While it is believed that ARNT/HIF1 β plays a role in beta cell insulin secretion, the mechanisms by which it regulates beta cell function are not known. We previously found that a reduction of ARNT/HIF1 β in 832/13 clonal beta cells led to a reduction in glucose utilisation, without affecting glucose oxidation or the ATP/ADP ratio [3]. Metabolic profiling of 832/13 cells deficient in ARNT/HIF1 β also showed reduced levels of pyruvate and the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle intermediates citrate/isocitrate, α -ketoglutarate, fumarate and malate, suggesting impaired anaplerosis. In the current study, a beta cell specific *Arnt/Hif1 β* knockout mouse (β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre}) was generated to further assess the mechanisms by which ARNT/HIF1 β regulates insulin secretion in beta cells, and how it leads to altered glucose homeostasis in vivo.

Methods

Reagents All reagents and kits were obtained from Sigma (St Louis, MO, USA), unless otherwise specified.

Generation of beta cell specific β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} mice β -*Arnt*^{fl/fl/Cre} mice were generated using Cre-loxP technology, as described in the electronic supplementary material (ESM) **Methods**. Mice were fed the Teklad Mouse Breeder Diet (Diet no. 8626; Teklad Diets, Madison, WI, USA). Experiments involving animals were approved by the local ethics committee.

Real-time PCR RNA was isolated using an Aaurum Total RNA Mini Kit (Bio-Rad, Mississauga, ON, Canada). cDNA was synthesised using an iScript cDNA Synthesis Kit (Bio-Rad).

Real-time PCR was performed using SsoFast EvaGreen Real-Time PCR Supermix (Bio-Rad). See ESM Table 1 for primer sequences.

Western blot Hypothalamic and islet proteins were extracted using cell lysis buffer (Cell Signaling, Whitby, ON, Canada) containing phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride (0.5 mmol/l), leupeptin (10 μ g/ml), aprotinin (10 μ g/ml) and pepstatin (5 μ g/ml). Extracts (40 μ g) were resolved on 10% Bis-Tris SDS polyacrylamide gels and electrotransferred to PVDF membranes (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA). ARNT/HIF1 β was detected using a rabbit antibody against ARNT/HIF1 β (1:500; Cell Signaling), followed by HRP-conjugated anti-rabbit antibody (1:15,000) (Sigma). γ -Tubulin was detected by immunoblotting with a mouse antibody against γ -tubulin (1:4,000) (Sigma), followed by HRP-conjugated anti-mouse antibody (1:15,000) (Amersham, Piscataway, NJ, USA). Protein bands were detected using the ECL Advance immunoblot detection kit (Amersham).

IPGTT, insulin tolerance test, respiratory exchange ratio, $\dot{V}\text{O}_2$ and $\dot{V}\text{CO}_2$ An intraperitoneal GTT was conducted and the respiratory exchange ratio (RER), volume of oxygen consumed ($\dot{V}\text{O}_2$) and volume of carbon dioxide produced ($\dot{V}\text{CO}_2$) were measured as described in the ESM **Methods**.

Islet isolation Human islets were provided by the Alberta Diabetes Institute Islet Core at the University of Alberta in Edmonton (AB, Canada), with the assistance of the Human Organ Procurement and Exchange Program and the Trillium Gift of Life Network in procuring donor pancreases for research (islets were obtained from four donors with an average age of 60 years) [4, 5]. Experiments involving human islets were approved by the local ethics committee. Mouse islets were isolated and cultured as previously described [3, 6].

Cell lines The 832/13 cell line [7], derived from INS-1 rat insulinoma cells [8], was used for some of these experiments. The cells were a gift from C. B. Newgard (Duke University, Durham, NC, USA) and were cultured as previously described [3, 6, 7, 9].

siRNA transfection and generation of adenoviruses expressing siRNAs against ARNT/HIF1 β Expression of ARNT/HIF1 β was suppressed in 832/13 cells by the introduction of small interfering (si)RNA duplexes or adenoviruses, as described in the ESM **Methods**.

Islet content and secretion of insulin and human growth hormone Cell and islet glucose-stimulated insulin secretion (GSIS) was measured as previously described [3, 6, 9]. For the KCl plus diazoxide studies, islets were pretreated for 1 h in KRB with 2 mmol/l glucose, followed by the addition of

either 2 or 12 mmol/l glucose with or without 30 mmol/l KCl and 200 μ mol/l diazoxide for 1 h. For the dimethylmalate (DMM) and dimethyl α -ketoglutarate (DM α KG) studies, 10 mmol/l of each was added to freshly prepared KRB solution on the day of the assay. After the assay, the buffer was collected and assayed for insulin using the Coat-A-Count RIA kit (Siemens, Los Angeles, CA, USA) and assayed for human growth hormone (hGH) secretion using a specific kit (HGH Human ELISA Kit; Life Technologies). Islet insulin content was measured as previously described [10]. Islet lysates were also assayed for hGH content using a specific hGH assay (HGH Human ELISA Kit; Life Technologies).

Oxygen consumption Oxygen consumption was measured using an XF24 Extracellular Flux Analyzer (Seahorse Bioscience, Billerica, MA, USA), as previously described [11], in either 832/13 cells (5×10^4 cells per well) or mouse islets (50 islets per well). On the day of the assay, cells were pretreated with 2 mmol/l glucose for 2 h. Oxygen consumption was then measured in response to: 2 mmol/l glucose; 8 mmol/l glucose; 5 μ mol/l oligomycin; 50 μ mol/l 2,4-dinitrophenol (DNP) with

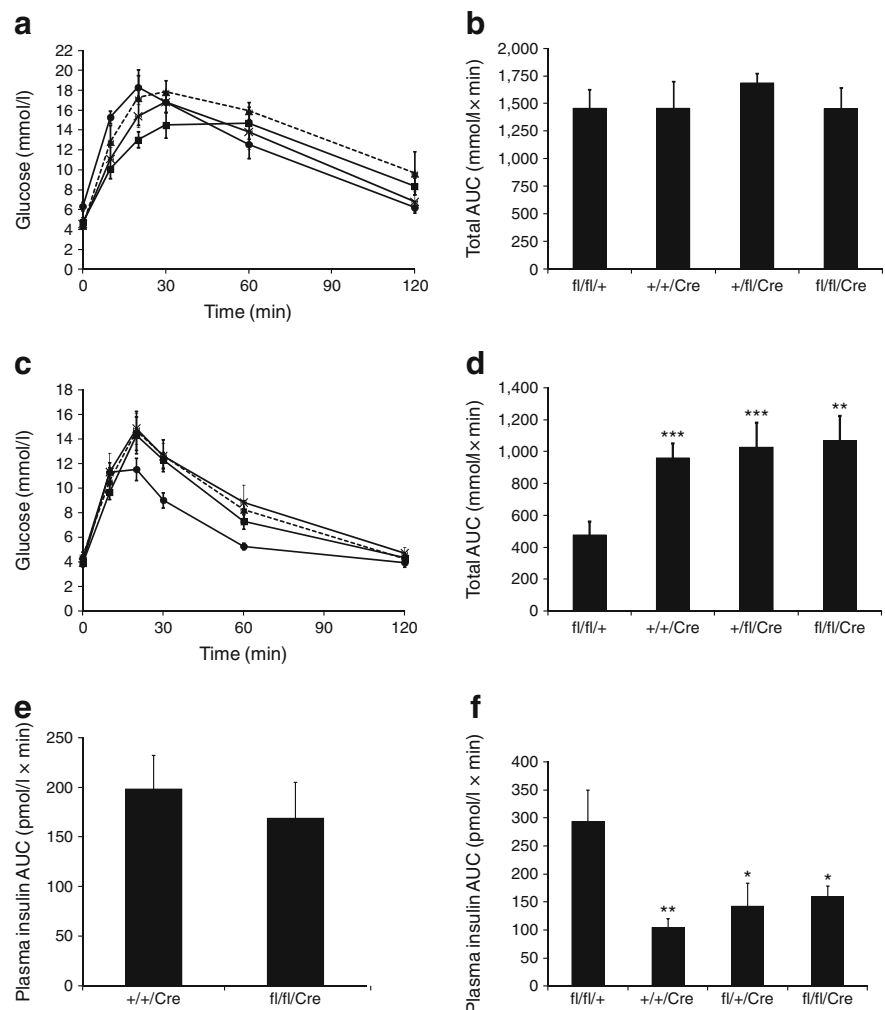
20 mmol/l pyruvate for cells or 5 mmol/l DMM + DM α KG for islets; and 5 μ mol/l rotenone and 5 μ mol/l myxothiazol.

Calcium and mitochondrial membrane potential imaging

Changes in intracellular calcium concentrations were assessed using Fura-2AM (Life Technologies) in dispersed islet cells as previously described [12]. Mitochondrial membrane potential (MMP) was quantified in islets using a mitochondrial-specific dye (rhodamine 123) as previously described [12].

NADPH and NADP⁺ measurements 832/13 cell NADPH and NADP⁺ levels were measured using a NADPH/NADP⁺ quantification kit (MAK038; Sigma). Briefly, 832/13 cells were plated onto a six-well plate and transfected with either control siRNA or *Arnt/Hif1 β* siRNA. After 72 h, cells were preincubated for 2 h with KRB containing 2 mmol/l glucose at 37°C, 5% CO₂. Cells were then treated with KRB containing either 2 or 16.7 mmol/l glucose for 1 h. Two wells of the six-well plate were pooled, and NADPH and NADP⁺ were extracted and then quantified. Islet ATP, ADP, NADP⁺ and NADPH levels were measured by HPLC as previously described [9].

Fig. 1 IPGTT measurements. **(a)** IPGTT in male mice. **(b)** AUC of **(a)**. **(c)** IPGTT in female mice. **(d)** AUC of **(c)**. **(e)** Male plasma AUC insulin levels during the IPGTT of **(a)**. **(f)** Female plasma AUC insulin levels during the IPGTT of **(c)**. fl/fl+, control mice (circles), +/+Cre, control Cre mice (squares), +/flCre, heterozygous mice (triangles) and fl/flCre, β -*Arnt*^{fl/flCre} mice (crosses). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ for +/+Cre, fl/+Cre or fl/flCre vs fl/fl+. $n = 9$ –12 per genotype for both males and females. Data are means \pm SEM



Statistical analysis All results are given as means \pm SEM. Statistical significance was assessed using Student's *t* test or by one- or two-way ANOVA, followed by multiple comparisons with a Holm–Sidak correction.

Results

Generation of beta cell specific β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice To study the role of ARNT/HIF1 β in pancreatic beta cells, a Cre–loxP technique was used to specifically disrupt the *Arnt/Hif1 β* gene in beta cells. The Cre-mediated recombination resulted in the beta cell specific deletion of exon 6 (confirmed by PCR on islet genomic DNA), which encodes the basic helix-loop-helix region of the ARNT/HIF1 β protein (ESM Fig. 1a). Islet *Arnt/Hif1 β* mRNA was reduced by 73 \pm 4% in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets and by 33 \pm 15% in heterozygous islets compared with control mouse islets (ESM Fig. 1b). ARNT/HIF1 β protein levels were also reduced by 79 \pm 6% in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets (ESM Fig. 1c). A small amount of genomic DNA recombination (deletion of *Arnt/Hif1 β* exon 6, data not shown) was found by PCR in the hypothalamus; however, neither *Arnt/Hif1 β* mRNA (data not shown) nor protein (ESM Fig. 1c) levels were altered in the hypothalamus.

In vivo glucose homeostasis The only significant difference seen in 16 h fasting blood glucose values was among male control mice vs control Cre mice, heterozygous mice and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice (ESM Fig. 1d). Female fasting blood glucose levels did not significantly differ among the groups

(ESM Fig. 1d). Fasting plasma NEFA levels also did not differ among control, control Cre, heterozygous or β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} female mice (ESM Fig. 3a). An IPGTT was performed on 15- to 20-week-old female and male mice after a 16 h fast. We did not find any differences during the IPGTT for male mice, and only control female mice had a significantly lower AUC as compared with control Cre, heterozygous and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice (Fig. 1a–d). Plasma insulin levels from male mice during the IPGTT were not different from each other (Fig. 1e). Control female mice had a significantly higher plasma insulin AUC during the IPGTT compared with control Cre, heterozygous and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice (Fig. 1f), which was consistent with the improved glucose levels during the IPGTT.

To assess insulin action, an i.p. insulin tolerance test (ITT) was conducted on both male and female mice. The only significant (but small) difference seen for the ITT was between male β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice vs heterozygous and control Cre mice (Fig. 2a–d).

Comprehensive metabolic assessment of β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice The Comprehensive Lab Animal Monitoring System (CLAMS) was used to assess food intake, total activity, $\dot{V}O_2$ and $\dot{V}CO_2$ in 15–20-week-old male control Cre, heterozygous and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice. All measurements were normalised to body weight and the mice had ad libitum access to food and water during the experiment. There were no significant differences seen in body weight (Fig. 3a), food intake (Fig. 3b) or total activity (Fig. 3c) in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice compared with control Cre and heterozygous littermates. However, the RER, which is the ratio of $\dot{V}CO_2/\dot{V}O_2$, was significantly higher in

Fig. 2 ITT measurements. (a) ITT in male mice using 1.5 U insulin/(kg mouse weight). (b) AUC of (a). (c) ITT in female mice using 1.2 U insulin/(kg mouse weight). (d) AUC of (c). +/+Cre, control Cre mice (diamonds), +/-Cre, heterozygous mice (black triangles) and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice (fl/fl/Cre, white triangles). **p*<0.05 control Cre mice (+/+Cre) vs β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice (fl/fl/Cre). *n*=9–12 per genotype for ITT. Data are means \pm SEM

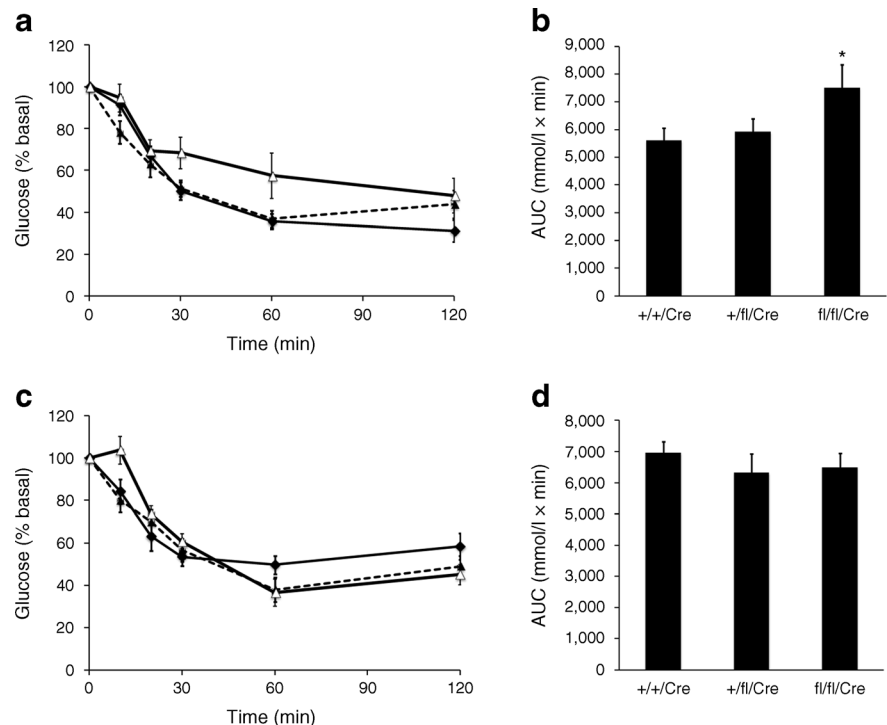
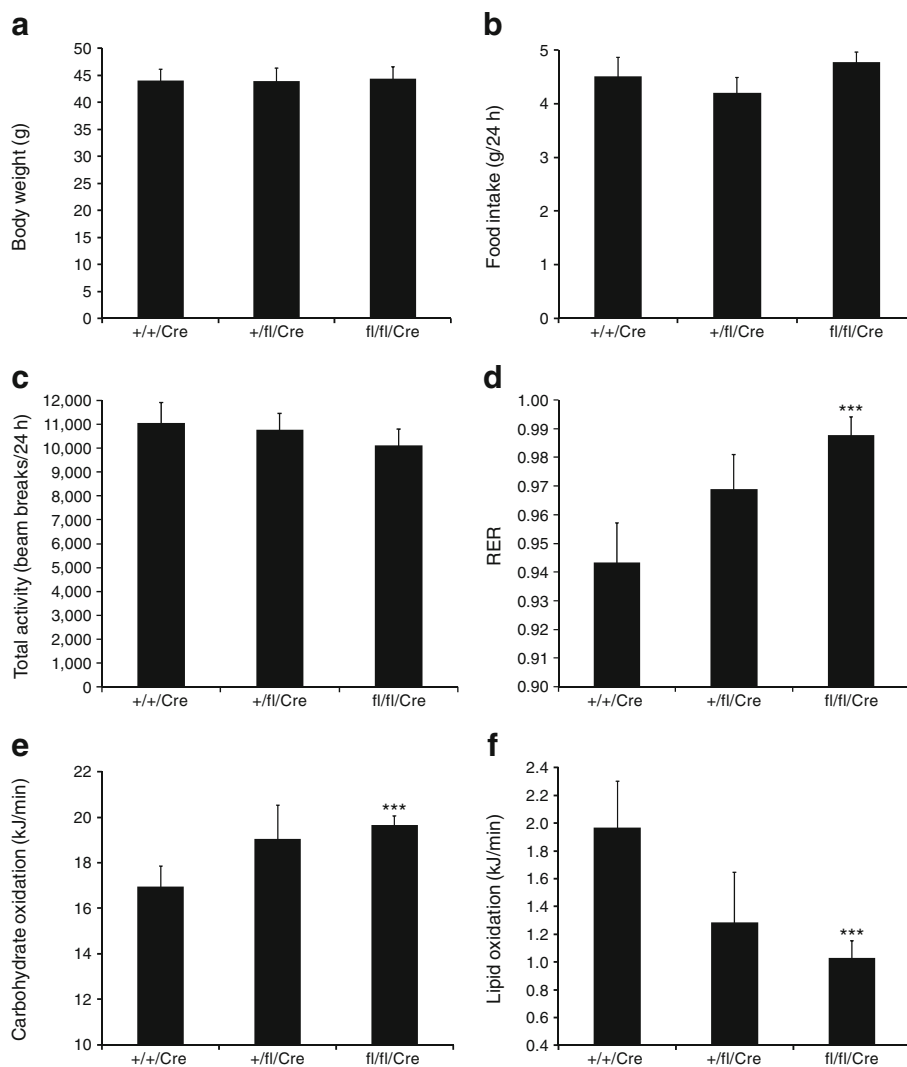


Fig. 3 Indirect calorimetry measurements of male control Cre (+/+Cre), heterozygous (+/flCre) and β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice. **(a)** Body weight, **(b)** food intake, **(c)** total activity, **(d)** RER, **(e)** whole-body carbohydrate oxidation and **(f)** whole-body lipid oxidation. *** $p < 0.001$ for β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice vs control Cre mice. $n = 9$. Data are means \pm SEM



β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice compared with control Cre littermates (Fig. 3d). An RER closer to 1 signifies preferential use of carbohydrates as an energy source, whereas an RER closer to 0.7 suggests a preference for the use of fat as an energy source. In support of these results, we found that β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice had significantly elevated whole-body carbohydrate oxidation (Fig. 3e) and significantly lower lipid oxidation (Fig. 3f). These in vivo studies suggest that β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice do not have any significant impairment of glucose homeostasis.

Mouse islet studies We next assessed whether islets from β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice had any defects in GSIS. Basal GSIS from both male and female β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} islets were not significantly different from each other, as compared with both control Cre islets and heterozygous islets (Fig. 4a–c). At 16.7 mmol/l glucose, islets from male β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice secreted 54 \pm 3% less insulin (Fig. 4a) and islets from female β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice secreted 67 \pm 10% less insulin (Fig. 4b), compared with

control Cre islets. Male heterozygous mice secreted 24 \pm 5% less insulin as compared with control Cre mice (Fig. 4a). At 12 mmol/l glucose, islets from female β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} mice secreted significantly less insulin than both control Cre islets and those from heterozygous mice (Fig. 4b).

In order to assess where the defect lies in insulin secretion, we first determined islet insulin response to KCl and diazoxide. Diazoxide was used to hold K_{ATP} channels open and KCl was used to depolarise the beta cell membrane, which effectively clamps cytosolic calcium at an elevated level. At 2 mmol/l glucose, β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} islets secreted 44 \pm 18% less insulin than control Cre islets in the presence of diazoxide and KCl (Fig. 4c), suggesting a possible defect in the K_{ATP} channel-dependent pathway that involves Ca^{2+} influx. At 12 mmol/l glucose, β -Arnt^{fl/flCre} islets secreted 49 \pm 6% less insulin as compared with control Cre islets in the presence of diazoxide and KCl (Fig. 4c), suggesting that ARNT/HIF1 β also plays a role in regulating the K_{ATP} channel-independent pathway.

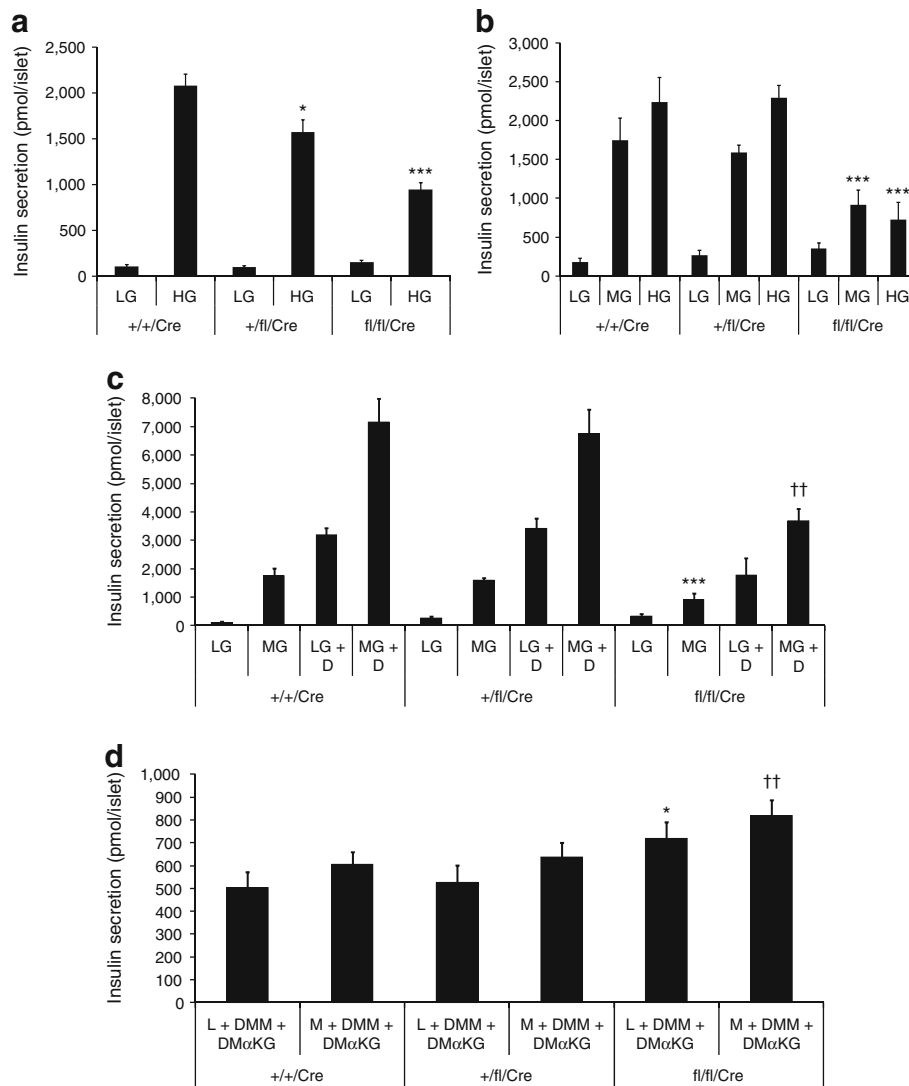


Fig. 4 GSIS from islets. **(a)** GSIS from male Cre control (+/+Cre), heterozygous (+/fl/Cre) and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} (fl/fl/Cre) islets in response to low (2 mmol/l; LG) and high (16.7 mmol/l; HG) levels of glucose. **(b)** GSIS from female Cre control (+/+Cre), heterozygous (+/fl/Cre) and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} (fl/fl/Cre) islets in response to LG, medium glucose (12 mmol/l; MG) and HG. **(c)** GSIS from female Cre control (+/+Cre), heterozygous (+/fl/Cre) and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} (fl/fl/Cre) islets in response to LG or MG, with or without 30 mmol/l KCl and 200 μ mol/l diazoxide (D). Data are means \pm SEM of eight to 10 independent experiments. * p <0.05 for HG +/fl/Cre vs HG control Cre islets; *** p <0.001 for MG or HG

β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets vs MG or HG control Cre islets; †† p <0.01 for MG+D β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets vs MG+D control Cre islets. **(d)** GSIS from female Cre control (+/+Cre), heterozygous (+/fl/Cre) and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} (fl/fl/Cre) islets in response to 2 mmol/l glucose (L) or 8 mmol/l glucose (M), both plus 10 mmol/l DMM and 10 mmol/l DM α KG. * p <0.05 for L+DMM+DM α KG β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets vs L+DMM+DM α KG female control Cre islets; †† p <0.01 for M+DMM+DM α KG β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets vs M+DMM+DM α KG female control Cre islets. Data are means \pm SEM of 3–6 independent experiments

A key player in the K_{ATP} channel-independent pathway of insulin release is glucose-regulated anaplerosis. We have previously shown that ARNT/HIF1 β regulates anaplerosis in clonal beta cells [3]. We next sought to rescue the defect in the K_{ATP} channel-independent pathway in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets using the anaplerotic substrates DMM and DM α KG. At both low and high glucose, DMM and DM α KG rescued the defects seen in insulin secretion and in fact significantly increased GSIS in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets as compared with control Cre islets (Fig. 4d). These results suggest that both the K_{ATP}

channel-dependent and -independent pathways are altered by the loss of ARNT/HIF1 β , and that both can be rescued by supplementation with anaplerotic substrates. The studies performed in Fig. 4a–d were all done in the same experiment with replicates.

Recently, it has been shown that some of the commonly used beta cell expressing Cre lines that use either the rat or mouse insulin promoter might produce and secrete hGH [13]. One of the suggested lines to secrete hGH is the RIP-Cre mouse line, similar to the one used in this study. Several key

findings from the previous study suggest that islets have elevated hGH content, and that secretion of hGH leads to activation of the prolactin receptor, increased insulin content and increased beta cell mass [13]. However, our RIP-Cre mice did not secrete any detectable hGH and islets contained only a small amount of hGH in all lines assessed (<1% of the hGH content seen in [13]), including flox control (fl/fl/+) islets that do not express Cre (ESM Fig. 3a). Detection of hGH in control (fl/fl/+) islets suggests that the hGH kit used in our study and that of Brouwers et al [13] might be reacting with other islet components besides hGH. We also found no significant differences in islet insulin content among any of the groups (ESM Fig. 3b).

Mitochondrial oxygen consumption rate in clonal 832/13 cells and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets We next looked at the oxygen consumption rate (OCR) in the absence of ARNT/HIF1 β . There was a significant reduction in GSIS from 832/13 cells treated with 16.7 mmol/l glucose and an siRNA against ARNT/HIF1 β ($p < 0.05$; 254 ± 24 μ U insulin/[mg protein] for control siRNA-treated cells vs 130 ± 13 μ U insulin/[mg protein] for Arnt/Hif1 β siRNA-treated cells). However, there was no significant difference seen in the OCR of clonal 832/13 cells treated with an siRNA against ARNT/HIF1 β in response to glucose, as compared with siRNA-treated control cells (Fig. 5a). ARNT/HIF1 β was knocked down in the clonal 832/13 beta cell line by $76 \pm 5\%$ in these studies. OCR was also not significantly different in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets in response to glucose as compared with control islets (Fig. 5b, c). This suggests that the oxidative capacity was not reduced in cells that lacked ARNT/HIF1 β . OCR in response to oligomycin (an ATP synthase inhibitor), DNP (a mitochondrial uncoupler) and rotenone and myxothiazol (electron transport chain inhibitors) were also not significantly affected in the clonal 832/13 cells or islets that lacked ARNT/HIF1 β (Fig. 5). These results indicate that loss of ARNT/HIF1 β does not lead to defects in mitochondrial respiration.

MMP in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets To further investigate the mechanism(s) underlying defective insulin secretion observed in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets, MMP was measured using the mitochondrial-specific dye rhodamine 123. The addition of 20 mmol/l glucose resulted in the hyperpolarisation of the mitochondrial membrane to the same degree in both control Cre and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets (Fig. 6a, b). The addition of 1 mmol/l sodium azide, a respiratory chain inhibitor, also resulted in the depolarisation of MMP to the same extent in both control and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets. These data suggest that the loss of ARNT/HIF1 β does not impact MMP.

Intracellular Ca²⁺ levels from β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets To investigate whether the impairment in GSIS observed in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets is due to changes in intracellular Ca²⁺

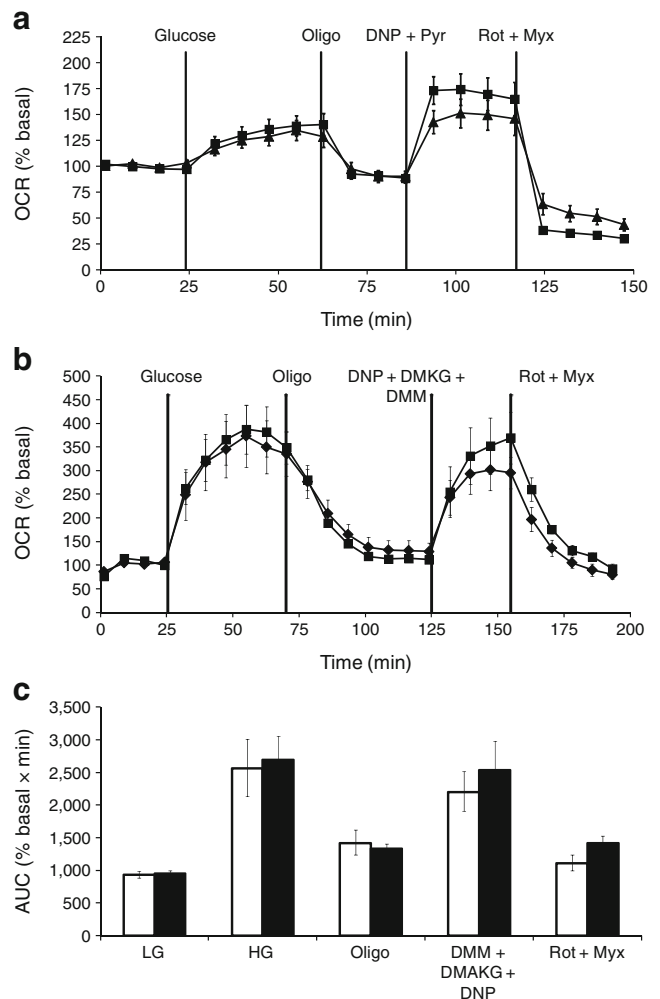


Fig. 5 Mitochondrial OCR in 832/13 clonal beta cells and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets. **(a)** Clonal 832/13 cells treated with either an siRNA control (squares) or siRNAs targeting ARNT/HIF1 β (triangles) **(a)** or β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets **(b, c)**; control Cre (+/+Cre) diamonds, β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} squares) were assessed for the OCR in response initially to 2 mmol/l glucose, followed by the sequential addition of 16.7 mmol/l glucose (Glucose); 5 μ mol/l oligomycin (Oligo); 50 μ mol/l DNP plus either 20 mmol/l pyruvate (Pyr; for clonal 832/13 cells) or 5 mmol/l DMM and DMAKG (for islet studies); and 10 μ mol/l each of rotenone (Rot) and myxothiazol (Myx). For **(a)** and **(b)**, values are expressed as per cent basal OCR. **(c)** AUC of **(b)** (white bars, +/+Cre; black bars, β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre}). Four independent experiments were conducted for the siRNA-treated cells. For islet experiments, data are means \pm SEM of 3–4 independent experiments

levels, we measured Ca²⁺ signalling in response to glucose. There was no difference seen in cytosolic Ca²⁺ levels at low glucose (2 mmol/l) in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets as compared with control islets (Fig. 6c, d). However, upon stimulation with 20 mmol/l glucose, the AUC for intracellular Ca²⁺ levels was $6.5 \pm 0.7\%$ lower in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets compared with control Cre islets. Depolarisation of the plasma membrane with 30 mmol/l KCl in the presence of 20 mmol/l glucose also led to a significant reduction in the AUC for intracellular Ca²⁺ levels by $6.0 \pm 0.8\%$ in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets as compared with

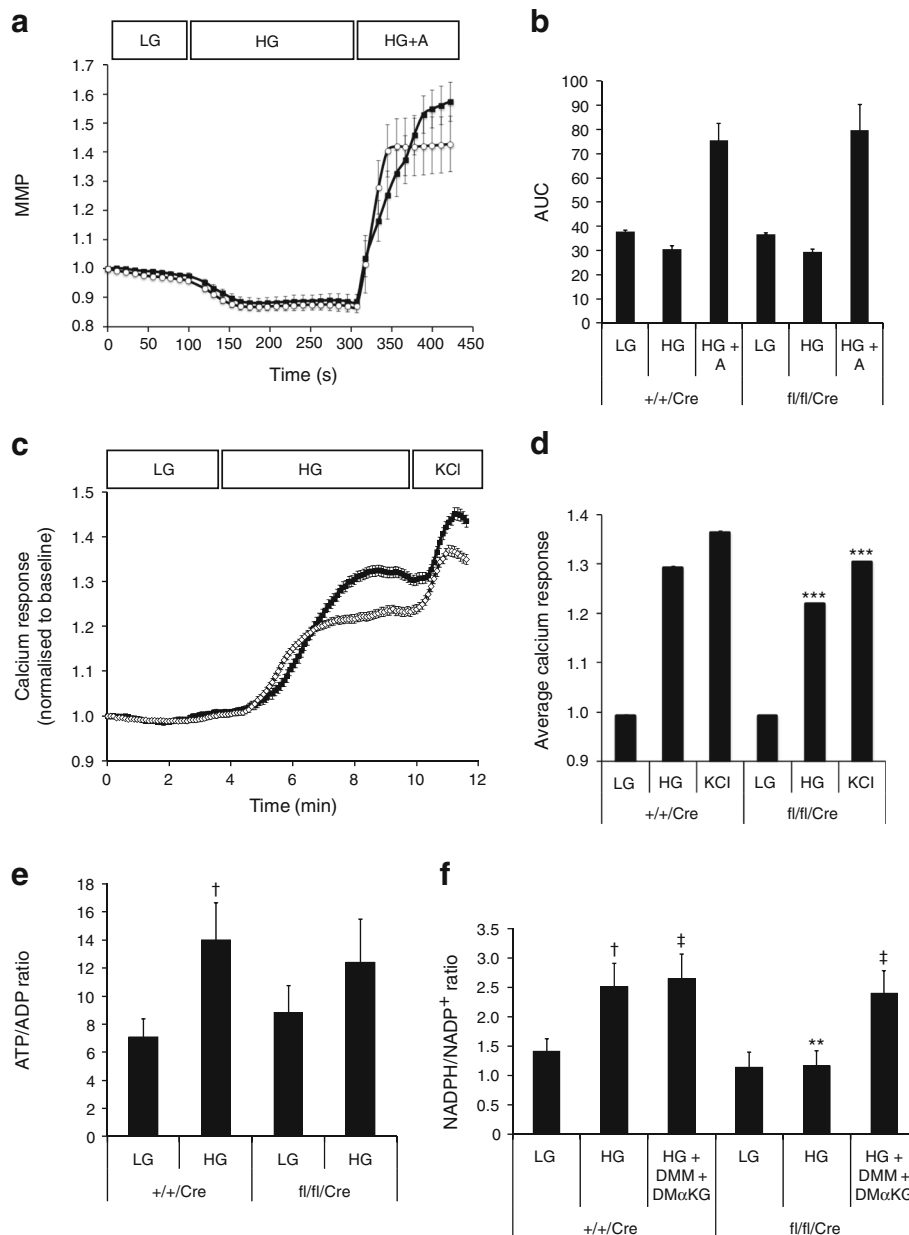


Fig. 6 MMP, Ca^{2+} dynamics and the $\text{NADPH}/\text{NADP}^+$ ratio in $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ islets. **(a)** MMP was assessed using rhodamine 123. Average fluorescent signals (normalised to baseline) of Cre control (+/+Cre; black squares) and $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ (white circles) islets in response to 2 mmol/l glucose (LG), 20 mmol/l glucose (HG) and 20 mmol/l glucose plus sodium azide (HG+A) ($n=4$ mice per group, with a minimum of 50 islets per mouse). **(b)** AUC of **(a)** (normalised response \times s). **(c)** Intracellular Ca^{2+} levels were measured with Fura-2 AM (Life Technologies). Average normalised baseline fluorescent response for Cre control (+/+Cre; black squares) and $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ (white diamonds) islets to 2 mmol/l glucose (LG), 20 mmol/l glucose (HG) and 20 mmol/l glucose plus

30 mmol/l KCl (KCl). **(d)** Average calcium response of **(c)**. LG average 0–2.1 min; HG average 6.8–9.1 min; KCl average 10–12 min. Data are means \pm SEM of three independent experiments. **(e)** ATP/ADP ratio in islets in response to 2 mmol/l glucose (LG) and 16.7 mmol/l glucose (HG) ($n=10$). **(f)** NADPH/ NADP^+ ratio in islets in response to 2 mmol/l glucose (LG), 16.7 mmol/l glucose (HG) or 16.7 mmol/l glucose (HG) plus 10 mmol/l DMM and 10 mmol/l $\text{DM}\alpha\text{KG}$ ($n=8$ –10). ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$ for HG $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ islets vs HG control Cre islets. † $p<0.05$ for HG vs LG control Cre (+/+Cre) islets. ‡ $p<0.05$ for HG + DMM + $\text{DM}\alpha\text{KG}$ vs LG control Cre (+/+Cre) or $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ islets

control Cre islets (Fig. 6c, d). The defects in Ca^{2+} signalling in $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ islets were delayed, with a peak delta difference of the normalised Ca^{2+} response 0.085 ± 0.002 seen at 9 min (Fig. 6c). This indicates that the loss of ARNT/HIF1 β leads to a reduction in glucose-induced Ca^{2+} influx.

Loss of ARNT/HIF1 β blocked the glucose-stimulated increase in the ATP/ADP ratio and led to a reduction in the NADPH/ NADP^+ ratio Consistent with no effect on islet respiration in $\beta\text{-Arnt}^{\text{fl/fl/Cre}}$ islets, we found that there was no significant effect on low- and high-glucose-stimulated

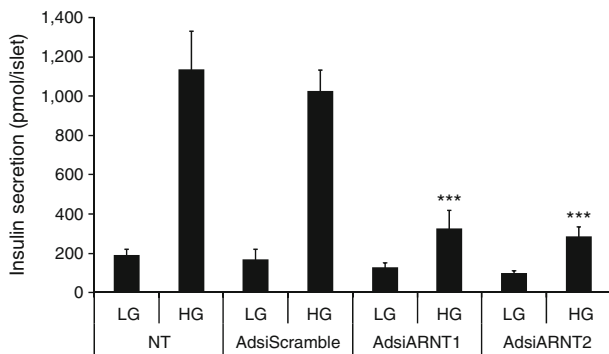


Fig. 7 GSIS from human islets with reduced ARNT/HIF1 β . GSIS from control no-treatment (NT), control adenoviral si (Adsi)Scramble or AdsiARNT1/2-treated human islets in response to 2 mmol/l (LG) or 16.7 mmol/l (HG) glucose ($n=8$). *** $p<0.001$ for HG AdsiARNT1/2-treated vs HG AdsiScramble islets

increases in the ATP/ADP ratio as compared with control Cre islets (Fig. 6e). However, unlike control Cre islets, β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets did not show a significant increase in the ATP/ADP ratio in response to high glucose (Fig. 6e). This suggests that the dynamic increase in the ATP/ADP ratio that is typically seen in islets is lost in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets.

We next investigated a key signalling molecule generated in the K_{ATP} channel-independent pathway by anaplerosis, NADPH [3, 14–16]. The lack ARNT/HIF1 β led to a loss of the glucose-stimulated increase in the NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio in the clonal beta cell line 832/13 cells (ESM Fig. 2b) and in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets (Fig. 6f). The decrease in the NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets in response to glucose could be rescued by the addition of the TCA intermediates DMM and DM α KG (Fig. 6f). These results are consistent with a defect in the K_{ATP} channel-independent pathway in beta cells that lack ARNT/HIF1 β .

Human islet insulin secretion Knockdown of ARNT/HIF1 β in human islets using siRNA adenoviruses (AdsiARNT1 and AdsiARNT2 targeted to two different regions in the *ARNT/HIF1 β* gene) resulted in a significant reduction in *ARNT/HIF1 β* mRNA expression (AdsiARNT1 by 67 \pm 7% and AdsiARNT2 by 62 \pm 5%) and inhibited GSIS (Fig. 7).

Discussion

In the present study, we used pancreatic beta cell specific ARNT/HIF1 β knockout mice to characterise the metabolic defect(s) seen in ARNT/HIF1 β knockout islets. We show that ARNT/HIF1 β is critical for maintaining the normal secretory function of pancreatic beta cells in vitro. The β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} islets had defective K_{ATP} channel-dependent and -independent insulin secretion, which was associated with a reduction in glucose-stimulated changes in cytosolic calcium and in glucose-stimulated increases in the NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio.

The defects in insulin secretion could be rescued by adding the TCA intermediates malate and α -ketoglutarate, which is consistent with our previous studies showing a defect in anaplerosis in ARNT/HIF1 β knockout beta cells. Surprisingly, the only in vivo defect found in the β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice compared with control Cre mice (+/+Cre) was a significantly higher RER, suggesting a preference for carbohydrate fuel utilisation; in addition, males had impaired insulin action. None of the male mouse lines showed a significant difference in IPGTT; however, female control floxed mice had higher in vivo insulin levels and an improved IPGTT than control Cre, heterozygous and β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice.

Interestingly, male β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice had defective insulin action and increased RER. The increased RER in male β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice suggests an in vivo preference for using carbohydrates as a fuel, and one possible reason for this is changes in key metabolic tissues. The main metabolically active insulin-sensitive tissues are the liver and skeletal muscle [17]. Changes in fuel preferences in these two tissues can have dramatic effects on whole-body metabolism [18]. However, plasma glucose, plasma NEFA, food intake, total activity level, fat-pad size (data not shown) and body weight were similar in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} and control Cre mice, suggesting that any changes in fuel preference in these tissues do not affect a number of key in vivo variables. It has been suggested that a sedentary lifestyle increases RER values and decreases sensitivity to insulin [19–21]. In this scenario, mice would tend to accumulate more fat. This possibility also does not fit with our β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mouse phenotype, as these mice had normal levels of total activity and fat-pad size.

Another possible cause of these changes in insulin action and RER is a loss of ARNT/HIF1 β in the hypothalamus. Although we found that there was a small amount of genomic recombination of ARNT/HIF1 β in the hypothalamus, these changes did not result in any differences in *Arnt/Hif1 β* mRNA or protein levels in the hypothalamus. It is possible that looking at whole-hypothalamic changes in ARNT/HIF1 β might not fully capture events in a small subset of neurons with altered ARNT/HIF1 β levels. The altered subset of neurons is unlikely to be the pro-opiomelanocortin (POMC) neurons, as deletion of ARNT/HIF1 β in this population of neurons has been reported to have dramatic effects on obesity [22]. At this point, we do not know why there are changes in insulin action and RER in β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice, and this is an active area of research. However, it is intriguing to speculate that the insulin-producing hypothalamic neurons might be involved in these changes.

Our results with isolated islets from β -Arnt^{fl/fl/Cre} mice clearly indicate that ARNT/HIF1 β plays a role in the metabolic regulation of insulin secretion. We have also shown that siRNA-mediated knockdown of ARNT/HIF1 β in human islets also inhibits GSIS. Our studies demonstrate that the two signals critical for insulin secretion—rises in the

NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio and intracellular Ca²⁺—are key players regulated by ARNT/HIF1 β . As previously shown by our group, loss of ARNT/HIF1 β in 832/13 cells leads to a decrease in the glucose-induced rise in TCA cycle intermediates [3]. We have now shown that this loss of anaplerosis is associated with a reduction in the glucose-stimulated rise in the NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio, and that we can rescue insulin release and the loss of NADPH/NADP⁺ signalling by replenishing the TCA intermediates. In addition to its role in regulating anaplerosis and NADPH, ARNT/HIF1 β also regulates Ca²⁺ signalling in beta cells. This appears to be dependent on the role of ATP in cells that lack ARNT/HIF1 β . Our results are consistent with those of another study in which siRNA-mediated knockdown of ARNT/HIF1 β was associated with inhibited GSIS, reduced glucose-stimulated plasma membrane depolarisation and reduced K_{ATP} channel activity in INS1 clonal cells [23].

One possible regulator of ARNT/HIF1 β is carbohydrate-responsive element-binding protein (ChREBP). It has been shown that the ChREBP is a negative regulator of *Arnt/Hif1 β* gene expression in mouse islets [24]. Thus, elevated glucose levels could lead to an increase in ChREBP transcriptional activity and reduced ARNT/HIF1 β levels. This could provide one mechanism by which chronically elevated glucose (glucotoxicity) could inhibit insulin release. This possibility is currently being investigated in the laboratory.

There are some differences between our study and that of Gunton et al [2], which also looked at the role of ARNT/HIF1 β . This might be due to a number of factors, the most important of which is that we used two controls (+/+Cre and fl/fl/+ mice), whereas the Gunton study used only fl/fl/+ mice as the primary control [2]. Other possible differences could include different diets, gut microbiota, genetic backgrounds and the extent of ARNT/HIF1 β knockout. Another less likely possibility for the differences seen between the two studies is that the RIP-Cre strains used might have had unique phenotypes. This issue with the RIP-Cre mouse line arose after the publication of the Gunton et al study in 2005 [2], and thus revisiting these results is critical to moving forward with our understanding of the role of ARNT/HIF1 β in insulin secretion and diabetes. It has recently been shown that some beta cell specific Cre lines might express and secrete hGH [13]. However, we could not find any detectable release of hGH from any of the islet groups in this study, and could only detect about 1% of the total hGH islet content found in the Brouwers et al study in islets expressing fl/fl/+ and RIP-Cre [13]. Overall, hGH does not seem to be playing as big a role in the RIP-Cre mouse line as it does in the *pdx1-Cre^{late}* mouse line, and is unlikely to have been a factor in the current study.

In conclusion, ARNT/HIF1 β plays a key role in maintaining the secretory function of pancreatic beta cells, mainly through the regulation of calcium signalling, anaplerosis and the NADPH/NADP⁺ ratio. The in vivo role of ARNT/HIF1 β

is more controversial and requires further investigation. As the ARNT/HIF1 β knockout islets have defective insulin secretion in vitro, it is likely that these animals might be predisposed to developing diabetes if stressed, for example with a high-fat diet.

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Contribution statement RP and JWJ performed some of the mouse and human islet studies and wrote the paper. SP and MHO helped with some of the in vivo and mouse islet studies. KC helped with the in vivo studies. MHu helped with some of the mouse islet studies. Evaluation of whole-body bioenergetics in mice using CLAMS was carried out in collaboration with ART and EB. Calcium and MMP measurements were carried out in collaboration with MBW and KJP. FJG helped with the conceptual design of the paper and provided the *Arnt/Hif1 β* floxed mice. SP, MHO, KC, KJP, EB, MHu, FJG, ART and MBW helped with revising the paper. JWJ is responsible for the integrity of the work as a whole. All authors approved the final version of the paper.

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