

Comparison of the bioavailability and intestinal absorption sites of phytoene, phytofluene, lycopene and β -carotene

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- 1 Comparison of the bioavailability and intestinal absorption sites of
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- 15 **Abbreviated running Title:** Bioavailability and intestinal absorption sites of tomato
- 16 carotenoids

Abstract

The mechanisms of main tomato carotenes (phytoene, phytofluene, lycopene and β -carotene) intestinal absorption are still only partly understood. We thus compared carotene bioavailability in mice after gavage with carotene-rich oil-in-water emulsions. We also determined each carotene absorption profile along the duodenal-ileal axis of the intestine to identify their respective absorption sites and compared these profiles with the gene expression sites of their identified transporters, i.e. SR-BI and CD36. Our data show that phytofluene presented a significantly higher bioavailability compared to lycopene and β -carotene (areas under the curve of 0.76 ± 0.09 vs. 0.30 ± 0.05 , 0.09 ± 0.05 and 0.08 ± 0.01 μ mol/L.h for phytofluene, phytoene, lycopene and β -carotene, respectively). β -carotene was mostly converted in the proximal and median intestine. Phytoene and phytofluene accumulation tended to be more important in the distal intestine, which did not correlate with the proximal expression of both *Scarb1* and *CD36*. Overall, these results highlight the high bioavailability of phytofluene.

Key words: tomato carotenoid, digestion, enterocyte, intestine, mice.

- 36 Abbreviations: CD36 (CD36 molecule), CRBPII (Cytosolic Retinol Binding Protein Type
- 37 II), LRAT (Lecithin-Retinol Acyltransferase), SR-BI (Scavenger Receptor class B type I),
- 38 NPC1-L1 (NPC1 like intracellular cholesterol transporter 1).

1. Introduction

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Carotenoids represent a broad family of about 800 molecules synthetized by plants and microorganisms, around 40 of which are found in significant amounts in human diets. Nonoxygenated and oxygenated carotenoids belong to the carotene and xanthophyll family, respectively. The main dietary carotenes are β - and α -carotene, and lycopene. Interestingly, a recent emphasis has been made on two other carotenes: phytoene and phytofluene (see for review: (Reboul, 2019)). These molecules can be found in high (0.5-2 mg/100 g of fresh weight) or very high (> 2 mg/100 g of fresh weight) concentrations (George Britton & Khachik, 2009) in tomatoes, carrots, oranges and apricots, and are detectable in significant amounts in both human plasma and tissues, where they might display specific health benefits (Melendez-Martinez, Mapelli-Brahm, Benitez-Gonzalez, & Stinco, 2015). Indeed, phytoene and phytofluene present particular properties due to their molecular structures. While other dietary carotenoids contain at least 10 conjugated double bounds, phytoene and phytofluene only present 3 and 5 conjugated double bounds, respectively (Table 1). These reduced numbers of double bounds are responsible for their lack of color, their twisted shape, and likely affect both their bioavailability and functional properties (Melendez-Martinez, Mapelli-Brahm, Benitez-Gonzalez, & Stinco, 2015). Both phytoene and phytofluene were shown to display a higher bioaccessibility, i.e a better incorporation into mixed micelles, compared to lutein, \(\beta\)-carotene and lycopene (Jeffery, Turner, & King, 2012; Mapelli-Brahm, Corte-Real, Melendez-Martinez, & Bohn, 2017; Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). Phytofluene was also shown to be more absorbed by human intestinal cells in culture compared to phytoene (Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). Finally, phytoene was more bioavailable than lycopene in Mongolian gerbils

(Moran, Clinton, & Erdman, 2013) and in humans (Moran, Novotny, Cichon, Riedl, Rogers,
Grainger, et al., 2016). However, no comprehensive comparison of the bioavailability of the 4
tomato carotenes, i.e. phytoene, phytofluene, lycopene and β-carotene, has been conducted so
far *in vivo*.
To gain insight into carotene intestinal absorption, we thus i) compared the postprandial
responses of phytoene, phytofluene, lycopene and β-carotene after gavage in mice and ii)
investigated their absorption sites along mouse intestine.

2. Materials and methods

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2.1 Chemicals

- 76 All-E-β-carotene (>97% pure) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Saint-Quentin-Fallavier,
- 77 France). All-E-lycopene (>95% pure) and all-E-echinenone (>95% pure) were generous gifts
- 78 from DSM Nutritional Products Ltd (Basel, Switzerland). Phytoene (>99% pure, mainly
- 79 present as Z-phytoene) and phytofluene (> 99% pure, mainly present as Z-phytofluene) were
- 80 isolated from tomato extract as described previously (Mapelli-Brahm, Corte-Real, Melendez-
- 81 Martinez, & Bohn, 2017).

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2.2 Preparation of carotene-enriched emulsions for mouse experiments

- 84 To deliver carotenes to mice, carotene-rich emulsions were prepared as previously described
- 85 (Reboul, Goncalves, Comera, Bott, Nowicki, Landrier, et al., 2011) with minor modifications.
- An appropriate volume of the stock solution of each carotenoid was transferred to Eppendorf
- 87 tubes to obtain a final amount of 2 mg in each tube. Stock solution solvent was evaporated
- 88 under nitrogen. To facilitate the subsequent solubilisation of carotenoids in triolein, 15 μL of
- hexane were added. The sample was vortexed 20 sec and then 1 mL of triolein were added.
- 90 The mixture was vortexed 1 min and the hexane was evaporated under nitrogen. After 1 min
- of vortex, 1 mL of an aqueous solution (NaCl 0.9%, BSA 2% and phospholipids 0.1%) were
- 92 added. The sample was vortexed for 6 min and then probe-sonicated (20 sec two times) to
- obtain homogenous and stable emulsions that were used within 10 min. Mice were force-fed
- with 300 μ L of emulsions containing 250 μ g of either lycopene, phytoene, phytofluene or β -
- 95 carotene.

2.3 Animals and sample collection

Six-week-old wild-type male C57BL/6 Rj mice (21-23 g) were purchased from Janvier (Janvier, Le-Genest-St-Isle, France). The mice were housed in a temperature-, humidity- and light-controlled room. They were given a standard chow diet and water *ad libitum*. Mice were fasted overnight before each experiment. The protocol was approved by the ethics committee of Marseille (agreement APAFIS#13473-20180209184003330 v3).

One week before the experiment, a blood sample (≈ 50 μL) was collected from the submandibular vein at fast to evaluate mouse carotenoid status. On the day of the experiment, the mice (n= 4 to 6) were force-fed with one of the carotene-rich emulsions and additional blood samples (≈ 50 μL) were taken 1.5 h, 3h and 4.5 h after gavage. After 6 h, a last blood sample was taken by intracardiac puncture under sevoflurane anesthesia. The plasma was separated from the blood by centrifugation by using 3.8% sodium citrate as an anticoagulant. The intestine of each animal was then quickly harvested after euthanasia by cervical dislocation, and carefully rinsed with ice-cold PBS. The small intestine was cut into 5 equal segments of 6 cm (representing the duodenum, the proximal – medial – distal jejunum and the

2.4 Carotene extraction and HPLC analysis

homogenized and rapidly stored at -80 °C until analysis.

Carotenes were extracted from blood or intestine samples using the method previously described (Goncalves, Gleize, Roi, Nowicki, Dhaussy, Huertas, et al., 2013; Goncalves, Margier, Roi, Collet, Niot, Goupy, et al., 2014). The internal standard was echinenone. Phytofluene and phytoene were not reported to be metabolized in the intestine (Engelmann, Clinton, & Erdman, 2011) and were thus assayed in their native form. Conversely, as

ileum) along a total length of 30 cm. All samples were suspended in 500 µL PBS,

lycopene can be isomerized in the intestine (Richelle, Sanchez, Tavazzi, Lambelet, Bortlik, & Williamson, 2010), both Z- and all-E-lycopene were quantified and results were pooled. Similarly, as β-carotene is highly converted into retinyl esters in mice (Ribaya-Mercado, Holmgren, Fox, & Russell, 1989), retinyl oleate, linoleate, palmitate and stearate concentrations were measured together with β-carotene in samples obtained after gavage with the β-carotene-rich emulsion. Note that no retinyl esters were detected in the plasma of mice that received nonprovitamin A carotene. Retinol deriving from β-carotene, i.e. [retinol measured in mucosa samples after β-carotene gavage corrected for retinol present in mouse mucosa after nonprovitamin A carotenoid gavage], was also evaluated in mouse intestine. Retinol and retinyl esters recovered in these samples were then expressed in pmol equivalent to β -carotene (1 mol of β -carotene = $\frac{1}{2}$ mol retinol or $\frac{1}{2}$ mol retinyl esters). After lipid extraction with hexane, dried residues were dissolved in 200 µL of mobile phase (20% methyl-tert-buthyl ether – 80% methanol). A volume of 180 µL was used for HPLC analysis. The HPLC systems and methods were set up according to previous studies (Gleize, Steib, Andre, & Reboul, 2012; Reboul, Trompier, Moussa, Klein, Landrier, Chimini, et al., 2009). Each carotene was identified by retention time compared with pure standards.

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2.5 RNA extraction and transporter gene expression analysis along mouse intestine

Intestines of 3 fasting mice were harvested, carefully rinsed with ice-cold PBS, and cut in 5 segments of equal length. Total RNA was extracted from scraped mucosa (n = 3 per group) using TRIzol reagent (Euromedex, France). Total RNA concentration and quality were measured with the use of the BioDrop µLite (Isogen Life Science, De Meern, The Netherlands). cDNAs were synthesized from 1 µg total RNA. Real time quantitative PCR assays were performed with Sybr green mixes using a thermocycler Light Cycler 480 (Roche). For each condition, expression was quantified in duplicate, and *18s* rRNA was used

as endogenous control in the comparative cycle threshold (CT) method. Primer sequences
were 18s [F: CGCCGCTAGAGGTGAAATTCT and R: CATTCTTGGCAAATGCTTTCG],

Scarb1 [F: AGCGCCAAGGTCATCATC and R: CTGCCTAACATCTTGGTCCTG], cd36

[F: CTTGTGTTTTGAACATTTCTGCTT and R:

TTGTACCTATACTGTGGCTAAATGAGA].

2.6 Calculations and statistical analyses

concentrations over 6 h, using the trapezoidal rule. Results are expressed as means \pm SEM. For ANOVA, normality of the residuals was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov, using the Lilliefors correction, and Shapiro-Wilk tests while equality of variances was checked by Levene's test. Differences in postprandial carotenoid peak concentrations (C_{max}) and intestinal carotenoid concentrations were analyzed using ANOVA. Tukey's test, which maintains the family-wise error rate at alpha = 0.05, was used as a post hoc for pairwise comparisons. Due to heteroscedasticity not resolved by data transformation, differences in carotenoid bioavailability were analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Dunn's test, with the Bonferroni adjustment was used as a post hoc test for pairwise comparisons. Values of p<0.05 were considered significant. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (version 20, SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Carotenoid bioavailability was assessed by measuring the AUC of their postprandial plasma

3. Results

3.1 Postprandial plasma carotene responses in mice

We first assessed the appearance of carotenes in mouse blood compartment after gavage with the different emulsions (Figure 1). β-carotene was largely recovered as retinyl esters (> 95%). Phytoene, lycopene and β-carotene peaked in plasma around 3 h after gavage, while phytofluene peaked around 4.5 h. The 4 carotenoids elicited significantly (p<0.001) different C_{max} (phytofluene: 0.22 \pm 0.03^a; phytoene: 0.10 ± 0.02^{b} ; lycopene: 0.03 ± 0.02^{bc} ; β -carotene: 0.02 ± 0.00^{c}). They also displayed significantly (p=0.002) different bioavailabilities, with phytofluene exhibiting significantly higher bioavailability compared to lycopene and β -carotene (0.76 \pm 0.09 a, 0.30 \pm 0.06^{ab} , 0.09 ± 0.06^{b} and 0.08 ± 0.01^{b} umol/L.h for phytofluene, phytoene, lycopene and β -

carotene, respectively).

3.2 Carotene accumulation by mouse intestine

The accumulation of the different carotenes did not significantly differ from one segment to another (Figure 2). β -Carotene (i.e. β -carotene + newly-formed retinol + retinyl esters) conversion by intestinal mucosa was preferentially localized in the proximal and median intestine (Figure 2D). Indeed, 90.0 to 92.5% of the β -carotene was converted in the 3 first segments (duodenum, proximal and median jejunum), while 53.2 to 54.4% was converted in the last 2 segments (distal jejunum and ileum). Interestingly, phytoene and phytofluene tended to accumulate in the distal part of the intestine (Figures 2A and 2B, respectively). For

example, the amount of phytoene recovered in the ileum was ≈ 4-fold higher than that found 188 189 in the duodenum. 190 Overall, the total quantity of the different carotenes in mouse intestinal mucosa were: $3.13 \pm$ 191 0.46^{a} nmol for β -carotene (recovered in the form of β -carotene, retinol and retinyl esters), 0.87 ± 0.16^{ab} nmol for phytofluene, 0.48 ± 0.13^{bc} for phytoene and 0.29 ± 0.16^{c} for lycopene 192 193 (p=0.001).194 3.3 Carotene transporter gene expression in mouse intestine 195 196 CD36 molecule (CD36) was mainly expressed in the proximal jejunum while Scavenger 197 Receptor Class B type I (SR-BI, encoded by Scarb1) was mainly expressed in the duodenum. 198 Both showed a decreasing expression along the duodenal-ileal axis of the intestine (Figure 3). 199

Discussion

The molecular mechanisms involved in the absorption of carotenoids are only partly
understood. Initially, Hollander and colleagues suggested that β -carotene was absorbed by
passive diffusion. However, studies have reconsidered this assumption and have shown that
carotenoid absorption mechanisms are more complex than previously described (Reboul &
Borel, 2011). In particular, we used Caco-2 cells and transfected Griptite cells to show that
the enterocyte uptake of provitamin-A carotenoids, including β -carotene, involved both SR-
BI and CD36. This was comforted by the fact that genetic variations in the genes encoding
these membrane proteins were associated with plasma concentrations of provitamin A
carotenoids at a population level (Borel, Lietz, Goncalves, Szabo de Edelenyi, Lecompte,
Curtis, et al., 2013). Recently, we also showed that SR-BI, but not CD36, was involved in
phytoene and phytofluene uptake in these two cell models (Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier,
Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). NPC1-like intracellular cholesterol
transporter 1, NPC1L1, which is another fat-soluble micronutrient transporter (Reboul &
Borel, 2011), was neither involved in the transport of lycopene (Moussa, Landrier, Reboul,
Ghiringhelli, Comera, Collet, et al., 2008) nor in that of colorless carotenoids (Mapelli-
Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). Overall, SR-BI
emerges as an efficient and ubiquitous carotenoid transporter at the intestinal level.
Despite a common SR-BI-dependent absorption pathway, carotene absorption efficiency
seems highly variable depending on the molecule considered. We thus performed a
comprehensive study to compare the bioavailability of the main tomato carotenes using a
postprandial model in mice. This model has previously been used to investigate both
carotenoids (Mensi, Borel, Goncalves, Nowicki, Gleize, Roi, et al., 2014) and fat-soluble
vitamins (Goncalves, Gleize, Bott, Nowicki, Amiot, Lairon, et al., 2011; Goncalves, et al.,
2014; Goncalves, Roi, Nowicki, Niot, & Reboul, 2014; Mensi, et al., 2014) absorption, as

well as to determine fat-soluble vitamin absorption sites (Goncalves, Roi, Nowicki, Dhaussy, Huertas, Amiot, et al., 2015). Our data showed that phytofluene bioavailability was higher than that of β -carotene and lycopene, phytoene bioavailability being intermediate. This is consistent with our previous observation that both phytoene and phytofluene were able to transfer more efficiently to mixed micelles during the digestion process compared to β carotene and lycopene (Mapelli-Brahm, Corte-Real, Melendez-Martinez, & Bohn, 2017; Mapelli-Brahm, Stinco, & Melendez-Martinez, 2018). Our results are also in accordance with previous human studies showing that i/ lycopene and β-carotene postprandial responses are similar (O'Neill & Thurnham, 1998) and ii/ phytoene bioavailability is higher than that of lycopene (Moran, et al., 2016). Given the structural similarity between the studied molecules (all of them being linear carotenes), the difference between phytofluene bioavailability and that of lycopene is noteworthy. As indicated in our previous in vitro studies (Mapelli-Brahm, Corte-Real, Melendez-Martinez, & Bohn, 2017; Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018), phytoene and phytofluene have a greater number of sigma bonds, where rotation is possible (G. Britton, Liaaen-Jensen, & Pfander, 2008), allowing them to fold more freely and to adopt less rigid shapes compared to lycopene (Lima, Sousa, Freitas, Ribeiro, de Sousa, & da Silva, 2017; Melendez-Martinez, Paulino, Stinco, Mapelli-Brahm, & Wang, 2014). This greater torsional capacity could translate into a better insertion between lipid molecules composing mixed micelles, which in turn could explain their greater micellization efficiency (Mapelli-Brahm, Corte-Real, Melendez-Martinez, & Bohn, 2017; Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). This may also favor the binding with the membrane transporters responsible for their intestinal uptake, which in turn could explain their greater intestinal uptake efficiency (Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). Finally, this may facilitate their insertion into plasma membrane if a passive

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diffusion occurs. The difference in their bioavailability can also be due to the fact that both phytoene and phytofluene were delivered in Z-forms while lycopene and β-carotene were delivered in E-forms. Indeed, although results concerning β-carotene are conflicting, Zlycopene seems to be more bioavailable than E-lycopene (Desmarchelier & Borel, 2017). We then assessed carotene accumulation in mouse intestinal mucosa along the duodenal-ileal axis and results were as follows: β -carotene + retinyl esters^a \geq phytofluene^{ab} \geq phytoene^{bc} \geq lycopene^c. β-carotene accumulation profile displayed a shape along the duodenal-ileal axis of the intestine very close to that of retinol (Goncalves, et al., 2015). Additionally, β-carotene was also mostly converted in the proximal intestine, which is consistent with the proximal localization of the β-carotene 15,15' oxygenase-1 (BCO1) (Raghuvanshi, Reed, Blaner, & Harrison, 2015), Cytosolic Retinol Binding Protein Type II (CRBPII), retinal reductase and Lecithin-Retinol Acyltransferase (LRAT) (Herr, Wardlaw, Kakkad, Albrecht, Quick, & Ong, 1993). It is noteworthy that β -carotene postprandial response was not proportional to the important intestinal accumulation of β-carotene and its conversion products. This may be due to the fact that the intestine can store β-carotene from a first meal to release it during subsequent postprandial phases in humans (Borel, Mekki, Boirie, Partier, Alexandre-Gouabau, Grolier, et al., 1998). It would thus be interesting to perform another study during a longer period of time and with a second meal providing no carotenoids to further compare carotene release in the blood stream. Lycopene, which was recovered in low quantities compared to the other carotenes, accumulated similarly in the different parts of the intestine. Phytofluene and phytoene tended to accumulate in the distal part of the intestine, which has previously been observed for vitamin E and K (Goncalves, et al., 2015). Although transporter expression does not necessarily rely on protein level or activity, β-carotene accumulation interestingly showed a profile fairly similar to the gene expression of its identified transporters, and in particular to CD36 expression. Indeed, both Scarb1 and CD36 were

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mainly expressed in the proximal intestine, in accordance with previous work (Goncalves, Roi, Nowicki, Niot, & Reboul, 2014; Reboul, Soayfane, Goncalves, Cantiello, Bott, Nauze, et al., 2012). However, such similarity was not observed with the other carotenes. A first hypothesis to explain this discrepancy is that other carotenoid transporters, mostly expressed in the distal intestine, remain to be identified. A second hypothesis is linked to the fact that the accumulation of a given carotenoid within the mucosa is the result of both uptake and secretion of the molecule in the body or back to the lumen. Indeed, we previously showed that a fraction of phytoene and phytofluence is effluxed from the enterocyte to the apical media by Caco-2 cells (Mapelli-Brahm, Desmarchelier, Margier, Reboul, Melendez Martinez, & Borel, 2018). Thus, the accumulation of the colorless carotenoids in the ileum may be due to a delayed or less efficient apical and/or basolateral secretion in this part of the intestine. However, in this case, the reason why such distal accumulation is not observed for β -carotene and lycopene is not known. Altogether, our results show that phytofluene bioavailability in mice is higher than that of beta-carotene and lycopene after a gavage with standardized emulsions. Further investigations are now needed to confirm and understand why colorless carotenoids specifically accumulated in the distal intestine.

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Conflict of interest:

- 295 A.J.M.M. is a member of the advisory board of IBR-Israeli Biotechnology Research, Ltd.
- 296 (Yavne, Israel). Other authors declare no conflicts of interest or financial interest.

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418 Figure legends 419 420 Figure 1: Postprandial plasma carotene concentrations in mice after gavage with 421 carotene-rich emulsions 422 A: Phytoene (n=6). **B**: Phytofluene (n=5). **C**: Lycopene (n=6). **D**: β-Carotene and retinyl 423 esters (n=4). 424 Data are means \pm SEM. 425 426 Figure 2: Carotene contents of mouse intestinal segments after gavage with carotene-427 rich emulsions 428 A: Phytoene (n=6). **B**: Phytofluene (n=5). **C**: Lycopene (n=6). **D**: β-Carotene, newly-formed 429 retinol and retinyl esters (n=4). 430 Mouse intestines were harvested and cut in 5 segments of equal length, 6 h after gavage with 431 carotene-rich-emulsions. Data are means \pm SEM. 432 433 Figure 3: CD36 and Scarb1 expression along mouse intestine 434 **A**: *CD36*. **B**: *Scarb1*. 435 Relative gene expression profiles were analyzed by real-time PCR in mouse intestinal mucosa 436 (n=3). Values were normalized to 18S expression. Data are means \pm SEM. 437 438

Tables

Table 1: Chemical structures of tomato carotenes

Carotene	Structure of the molecules used
Phytoene	
Phytofluene	
Lycopene	
β-Carotene	







