

Translational Advances in Pediatric Nutrition and Gastroenterology: New Insights from Pig Models

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total parenteral nutrition, premature infants, necrotizing enterocolitis, short bowel syndrome, intestinal growth, glucagon-like peptide 2, parenteral lipid emulsions

Abstract

Pigs are increasingly important animals for modeling human pediatric nutrition and gastroenterology and complementing mechanistic studies in rodents. The comparative advantages in size and physiology of the neonatal pig have led to new translational and clinically relevant models of important diseases of the gastrointestinal tract and liver in premature infants. Studies in pigs have established the essential roles of prematurity, microbial colonization, and enteral nutrition in the pathogenesis of necrotizing enterocolitis. Studies in neonatal pigs have demonstrated the intestinal trophic effects of a

key gut hormone, glucagon-like peptide 2 (GLP-2), and its role in the intestinal adaptation process and efficacy in the treatment of short bowel syndrome. Further, pigs have been instrumental in elucidating the physiology of parenteral nutrition–associated liver disease and the means by which phytosterols, fibroblast growth factor 19, and a new generation of lipid emulsions may modify disease. The premature pig will continue to be a valuable model in the development of optimal infant diets (donor human milk, colostrum), specific milk bioactives (arginine, growth factors), gut microbiota modifiers (pre-, pro-, and antibiotics), pharmaceutical drugs (GLP-2 analogs, FXR agonists), and novel diagnostic tools (near-infrared spectroscopy) to prevent and treat these pediatric diseases.

INTRODUCTION

In the past 30 years, the pig has become a well-recognized model for human pediatric nutrition at all phases of early development, including fetal, premature, newborn, neonatal, and weanling ages. From a comparative biology perspective, pigs offer many advantages compared with other widely used animal models, mainly mice and rats, to support their validity as a model of normal, healthy human infant anatomy, physiology, and metabolism (1–6). As the use of pigs in human biomedical research has expanded, new frontiers have been established for their use in modeling fundamental principles in emerging areas of nutrition and gut microbiota development and host immune function, as well as the pathology and therapeutic approaches for treatment of complex human diseases that originate during infancy. This review describes how recent research using pigs has advanced our understanding of the role of nutrition and metabolism in the physiology and pathogenesis of several important diseases in pediatric gastroenterology that occur in premature infants.

Challenges of Nutritional Support of Premature Human Infants

Prematurity and low birth weight continue to be significant challenges in the care and nutritional support of human infants in the United States and worldwide (7–9). These infants have an immature gastrointestinal tract and innate immunity that increase morbidity and metabolic stress and lead to increased incidence of diseases such as necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), short bowel syndrome (SBS), and parenteral nutrition–associated liver disease (PNALD) (10–12) (**Figure 1**). These three conditions form a cascade of disease risks that face premature infants, and some incur more than one of these in the first weeks and months of life. These underlying conditions create a critical need to provide the optimal amount and composition of nutritional support to sustain normal growth, organ development, and function. However, despite the significant advancements and improved survival rates that have occurred in the past three decades in human perinatal clinical medicine, many premature and very-low-birth-weight (VLBW) infants still experience poor growth and neurodevelopmental outcomes (13–16).

Given the continuous challenge of prematurity to human pediatric nutrition and gastrointestinal disease and the ethical limitations of human investigation, it has become increasingly important to study the biology of premature and VLBW infants using translational animal models. The pig presents key advantages, including the ability for viable preterm delivery by cesarean section at late stages of gestation, which allows for various clinically relevant interventions, such as parenteral nutrition (PN), surgical intestinal resection, and orogastric tube feeding (**Figure 2**). This key feature, coupled with many of the previously established advantages, such as close comparative physiology

NEC: necrotizing enterocolitis

SBS: short bowel syndrome

PNALD: parenteral nutrition–associated liver disease

VLBW: very low birth weight

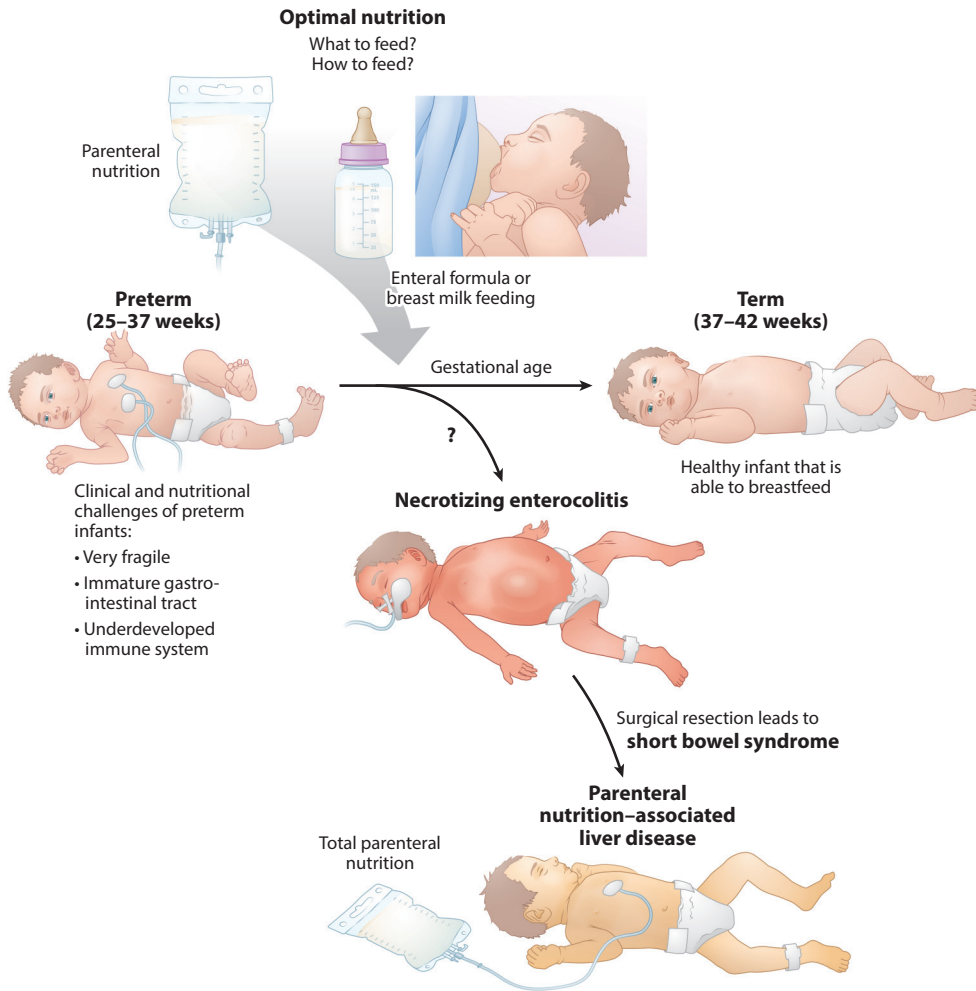


Figure 1

Clinical and nutritional challenges of preterm infants. Shown is an overview of the fundamental choices of how and what to feed preterm compared to term infants. These choices include intravenous parenteral nutrition (i.e., TPN) or enteral nutrition composed of infant formula or breast milk. The combination of immature intestinal digestive and immune function increases the risk for NEC, which can lead to intestinal resection and SBS. Prolonged parenteral nutrition resulting from GI disease (SBS) or other clinical morbidities increases the risk for PNALD. Abbreviations: GI, gastrointestinal; NEC, necrotizing enterocolitis; PN, parenteral nutrition; PNALD, parenteral nutrition-associated liver disease; SBS, short bowel syndrome; TPN, total parenteral nutrition.

and anatomy of the gastrointestinal tract, omnivorous diet, milk composition, body composition, and litter bearing, makes the pig a unique and cost-effective model (versus nonhuman primates). The feature of prematurity provides an especially clinically relevant model of NEC that allows the investigation of host-related biology and how it contributes to disease pathogenesis.

An important question pertains to the relative stage of prematurity of pigs versus human infants given the difference in gestation length (115 versus 280 days, respectively). The gestational length of commercial pigs can vary from approximately 115 days for most US herds to more than

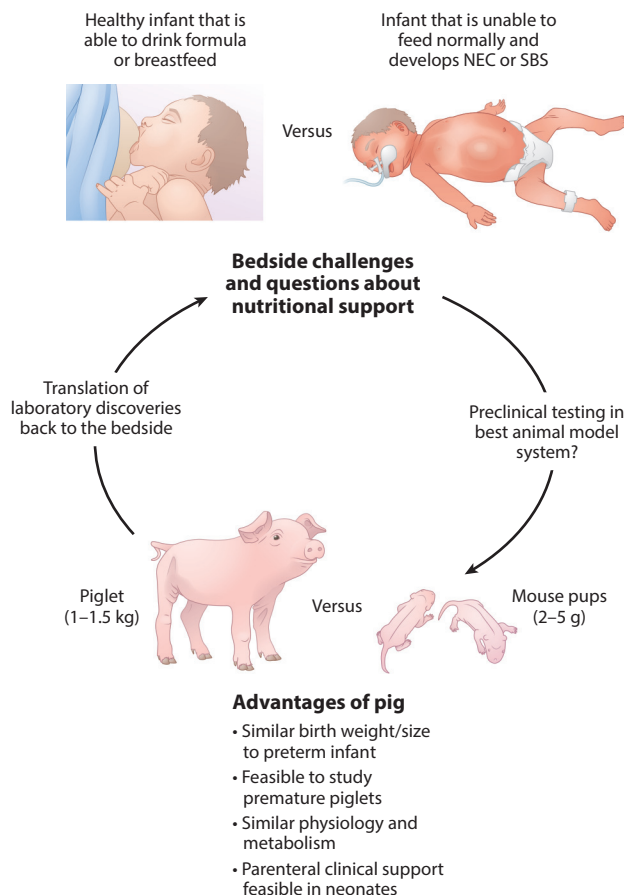


Figure 2

Translational relevance and advantages of the pig to investigate human pediatric nutrition and GI diseases. The similarities of the newborn pig to human infants in terms of body size, anatomy, and physiology provide a well-suited animal model to test questions that are not feasible or ethically possible in human infants. The pig also enables the use of clinical procedures and therapies (e.g., TPN, orogastric tube feeding, surgical intestinal resection) used in human infants that more closely simulate current medical practices. The advantages of newborn mice are lower cost and widely available genetic mouse models to test specific gene effects on GI and liver disease. Abbreviations: GI, gastrointestinal; NEC, necrotizing enterocolitis; PN, parenteral nutrition; SBS, short bowel syndrome; TPN, total parenteral nutrition.

117 days in Danish herds (4). Litter sizes also vary, being larger among Danish herds (~15–20 pigs) compared with those in the United States (10–12 pigs) as a result of genetic selection (17). The large litter size also results in varying birth weights, and pigs born with low birth weight or small for gestational age often occur spontaneously, which provides a model of natural intrauterine-growth retardation (18, 19). An assessment of the relative stage of prematurity in pigs compared with human infants is difficult, but our estimate is that preterm pigs born at 90% gestation are comparable to human preterm infants at 75% gestation (30–32 weeks) (4). This estimate is based on development of various organs; however, the gut is less mature and the brain more mature in pigs than in humans at an equivalent stage of gestation. Another difference is that newborn, term pigs are considered to be precocial, whereas term human infants are altricial; pigs are born with

locomotive ability even at one week preterm. As in humans, the key factor limiting the survival of preterm pigs is respiratory function, and recent evidence shows that pigs born at a gestational age of 102 days or earlier often die from respiratory distress (20, 21). Lung development of pigs born at 102 days of gestation is similar to that in 28–30-week infants with an intermediate stage of saccular alveoli development (20).

TPN: total parenteral nutrition

GLP-2: glucagon-like peptide 2

How, What, and When to Feed Preterm Infants

As a result of many of the underlying concerns noted above, basic questions continue to challenge clinicians, such as how, what, how much, and when to feed premature and VLBW infants. Owing to the immaturity in gastroduodenal motor function and the poorly developed ability to suck and swallow, nearly 70% of hospitalized premature VLBW infants experience enteral feeding intolerance and are nourished via PN for a substantial period after birth (22). In the past 50 years, PN has become a standard-of-care, lifesaving clinical support therapy for premature infants (23, 24). Despite the significant clinical benefit of PN, some clinical studies (25, 26) and many animal studies (27), including those in neonatal pigs (28–35), have shown that exclusive or total parenteral nutrition (TPN) leads to intestinal atrophy, reduced gastrointestinal blood flow, digestive dysfunction, and delayed development of the mucosal epithelium and innate immune function (**Figure 3**). These neonatal pig studies showed that within 8–12 h of removal of enteral nutrition and maintaining TPN, portal venous and superior mesenteric arterial blood flow is reduced by ~50%, epithelial cell apoptosis increases, and villus atrophy occurs (32). As villus atrophy and loss of mucosal mass progress, there is a reduction in intestinal digestive enzyme activity and capacity for lactose digestion and hexose absorption (30). PN provision results in a lack of luminal stimulus of the gut by enteral nutrients and reduced gastrointestinal secretions. Moreover, as in human infants (36), studies in neonatal pigs showed that enteral nutrition is important for secretion of many gut peptide hormones and growth factors, especially glucagon-like peptide 2 (GLP-2) (29). Thus, the need to provide an early and safe enteral stimulus to the premature intestine led to the concept of minimal enteral nutrition that is now widely used in clinical practice (37–40). Minimal enteral nutrition, or trophic feeding, involves the enteral administration of small amounts of human milk or formula in the early days after birth, followed by a gradual advancement of enteral feeding volumes until infants reach full enteral feeding. Studies in pigs demonstrated the quantitative importance of enteral nutrition and the amount necessary to sustain intestinal growth (29, 41). The questions of timing of enteral feeding and rate of volume advancement are also important considerations in premature infants, and early versus late feeding has been shown to influence the incidence of intestinal dysfunction in pigs (42–44).

Most premature and VLBW infants are started on PN immediately after birth, and the standard recommendation is to introduce minimal enteral feeding using human milk, either mother's own breast milk or donor human milk, owing to its well-established benefits for health and outcome (45–48). For many preterm infants, however, human milk is not available, and infant formula is fed instead. The underlying biological mechanisms to explain the health benefits of human milk versus formula are ethically difficult to study in human infants, yet studies in term and preterm pigs have revealed important clues. Our early studies in term, newborn pigs showed that pig colostrum and mature milk provide an important trophic stimulus to the gut, skeletal muscle, and brain and improve digestive function compared with formula (49–52). More recent studies in preterm pigs have shown that natural milks from pigs, humans, and cows provide a greater intestinal trophic stimulus and function advantage compared with infant formulas (53–57), findings that are reflected in our studies in preterm infants (39, 40). The increasing evidence to promote human milk feeding has prompted greater efforts to develop human milk banking to provide donor human milk

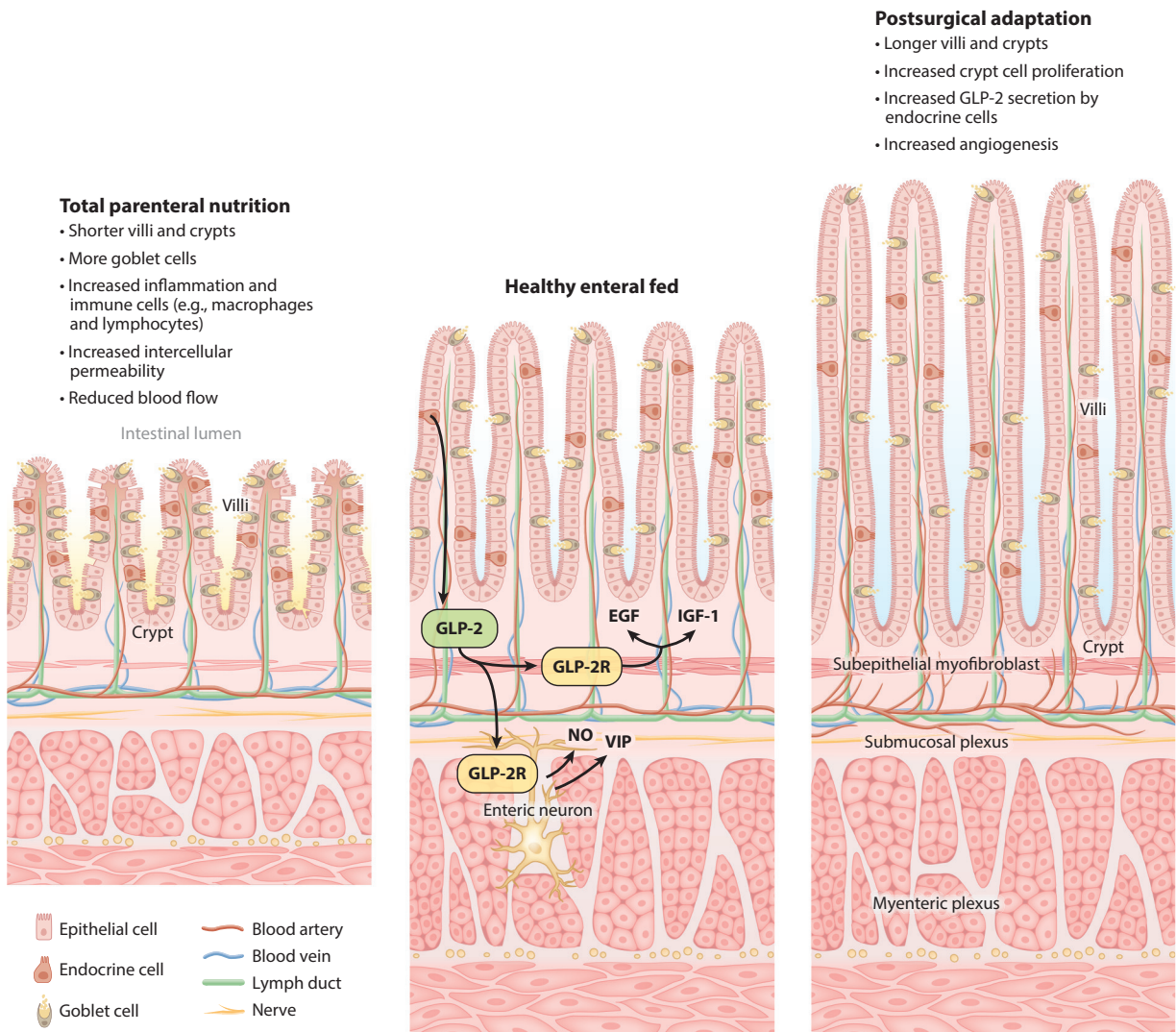


Figure 3

Intestinal mucosal adaptation to TPN and intestinal resection. Illustrated is the influence of TPN, a common clinical practice in hospitalized preterm infants, which deprives the gut lumen of enteral nutrition and results in mucosal villus atrophy, deterioration of intestinal barrier function, and infiltration of immune cells. Also shown is the influence of surgical resection of intestine, which occurs due to congenital and acquired GI diseases, that results in activation of adaptive processes that promote mucosal growth, such as increased GLP-2 secretion, crypt cell proliferation, and blood flow. GLP-2 is a key gut hormone that functions to activate mucosal enteric neuron release of NO and VIP as well as subepithelial fibroblast release of EGF and IGF-1. Abbreviations: EGF, epidermal growth factor; GI, gastrointestinal; GLP-2, glucagon-like peptide 2; GLP-2R, glucagon-like peptide 2 receptor; IGF-1, insulin-like growth factor 1; NO, nitric oxide; TPN, total parenteral nutrition; VIP, vasoactive intestinal peptide.

to preterm infants. Thus, the biological value of various forms of human milk, such as banked donor milk, banked mother's own milk, or expressed and breastfed mother's milk, and how they are processed has become a hot topic in pediatric nutrition (58). Recent studies in preterm pigs suggest that the method of pasteurization may impact the protective role of donor human milk (59). Also important is the fact that the content of some key nutrients in human milk fails to meet

preterm infant nutrient needs, and thus fortification of human milk with supplements is necessary (60). A key question regarding human milk fortification is whether the supplements should be derived from human or bovine milk. The nutritional value of human milk fortifiers has been investigated in preterm pigs, and recent evidence suggests that fortification of human milk with bovine colostrum provides improved growth and intestinal function compared with commercial bovine milk formula-based fortifiers (61). Importantly, this latter result in preterm pigs may be translationally relevant given recent preliminary results from a stepwise safety study suggesting that pasteurized bovine colostrum was safe and well tolerated in premature infants (62).

MODELING NECROTIZING ENTEROCOLITIS IN PRETERM PIGS

In the past several decades, NEC has been the leading cause of infant death from gastrointestinal disease, affecting 5–10% of those born premature in North America (11, 63, 64). The disease has a mortality as high as 50%, and surgical intervention is necessary in 20–40% of cases, leading to increased morbidity. The incidence of NEC is directly related to the degree of prematurity. Thus, with improved clinical care and increased survival of preterm, extremely low-birth-weight infants, this disease will continue to be a challenge in pediatric nutrition. For several decades, rodents have been the primary model used to study the pathology of NEC (63, 65, 66). The advantage of rodent models is their lower cost, short gestation period, and relatively large litters, as well as the ease of housing and maintaining rodent colonies. An especially important advantage of mouse models is the ability to examine single gene mechanisms using mouse genetics and commercially available transgenic and knockout models. The main limitations of the rodent models include the difficulties owing to their small size and fragility and the challenges in gavage feeding. Most rodent models of NEC evolved from the studies by Barlow et al. (67), in which histological changes representative of NEC were induced in newborn rats by using formula feeding, adding bacteria, hypoxia, and/or hypothermia. Since then, modifications have been made in some mouse models that also incorporate prematurity by delivering the pups by cesarean section 12–24 h prior to term (65, 68). Studies in rats and mice have been important in highlighting some of the key factors that contribute to the incidence and pathogenesis of NEC, namely enteral feeding, bacterial colonization, and host factors of immunology and vascular physiology.

Early pig studies investigating NEC imposed asphyxia, hypoxia, and modified dietary approaches (69–73) mostly in term, newborn pigs. However, in the past decade, several important advancements in pig studies have created a more clinically relevant model of NEC (4, 6). The premature pig model of NEC reproduces key features whereby, like in the human infant, the NEC incidence in preterm pigs is markedly higher than in term pigs (53). The pig model reproduces all the hallmark clinical and histological features of NEC in human infants, including abdominal distension, cyanosis, radiographic evidence of pneumatosis intestinalis, tissue coagulation necrosis, villus sloughing, mucosal tissue edema, and leukocyte infiltration. These histological signs of NEC also localize to the distal intestine and colon, as in humans, but early onset in the pig (<24 h) results in fulminant disease from the stomach to the large intestine. Whereas the rodent models require treatment with hypoxia, hypothermia, endotoxin, or bacteria, the preterm piglet develops NEC spontaneously within 2–4 days of feeding infant formulas or a combination of PN and formula—analogue to the preterm infant. Thus, the pig model recapitulates NEC disease using the standard clinical nutrition support given to human preterm infants. The pig NEC model diverges from clinical observations in humans in that disease develops sooner (2–4 days versus 2–4 weeks postnatally) and at higher incidence (30–80% versus 5–10%) than in the preterm infant, respectively.

An experimental approach that may hold promise for NEC research is the use of ex vivo intestinal enteroids that are being used to model host epithelial–pathogen interactions (74). A

LPS:
lipopolysaccharide

EGF: epidermal
growth factor

recent report showed the enteroids isolated from intestine from early- and late-stage fetuses and adults showed differential gene expression profiles and responses to lipopolysaccharide (LPS) (75). Gonzalez and colleagues (76–78) adapted the enteroid model using pigs and showed that enteroids isolated from intestine subjected to ischemic damage exhibit a blunted response compared with those derived from healthy intestine. We recently demonstrated the developmental changes in citrulline production capacity of preterm and term intestinal enteroids (79). Thus, enteroids appear to recapitulate the developmental program and responsiveness to injury observed in host intestine during NEC.

Role of Enteral Feeding and Diet in Necrotizing Enterocolitis Pathogenesis

Early clinical observations of NEC led to the hypothesis that enteral feeding triggers the disease. This thinking has led to the clinical practice of minimal enteral feeding (discussed above), whereby preterm infants at risk of NEC are given small-volume nasogastric feeds in the first few days after birth, which are increased depending on feeding tolerance. This practice prompted many physicians to adopt delayed introduction of enteral feeds (e.g., early versus delayed) and varying rates of enteral feed advancement (e.g., slow versus rapid) to reduce the incidence of NEC in preterm infants. The evidence is inconclusive regarding whether these practices are effective in preventing NEC in preterm infants (43, 65, 80). Our studies in preterm pigs showed that delayed initiation, but not gradual advancement of enteral feeding, is protective against NEC (42). The alternative to the idea that enteral feeding promotes NEC is that TPN or partial PN can prevent NEC. However, as noted above, it is well established in neonatal pig studies that TPN results in delayed intestinal growth and development marked by mucosal atrophy, compromised barrier, reduced digestive and transport function, and increased local inflammation (29–32).

The practice of feeding breast milk or human milk is the most well-established dietary approach to prevent NEC (45, 46, 58, 81). The promotion of human milk feeding to preterm infants has increased the interest in whether banked human donor breast milk is as effective in NEC prevention as mother's own milk. Several studies in preterm pigs have shown that milk from various species, including swine colostrum and mature milk, bovine colostrum, and donor human milk, protects against NEC (53, 55, 82). These pig studies also showed that the efficacy of unprocessed donor human milk in preventing NEC seems to slightly diminish with increased processing methods, such as pasteurization and spray drying. The advantage of breast milk versus formula has been linked to the many growth factors and immune-related proteins in breast milk, such as insulin, insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1), epidermal growth factor (EGF), lactoferrin, and transforming growth factor β (2, 83, 84). Clinical studies suggest that enteral lactoferrin may prevent NEC (85) and that oral insulin may improve feeding tolerance and enhance lactase activity in preterm infants and in pediatric SBS (86, 87). Studies examining formula supplementation with these milk-borne factors in term pigs produced mixed results, with some showing intestinal trophic effects (88–90) and protection against pathogen infection but limited efficacy in improving digestive function and prevention of NEC (91–93).

Enteral feeding as a causal factor in NEC has been linked to the idea that immature or insufficient digestive capacity of the premature intestine leads to malabsorption and bacterial overgrowth. Lactose is the most abundant carbohydrate in human milk, as it is in other mammalian species. Yet, studies in premature infants demonstrated that some degree of lactose malabsorption and colonic fermentation occur and that both lactose digestion and glucose absorption are increased with gestational age (94–97). Studies in preterm and term pigs support clinical findings and show that glucose transport and sodium-dependent, glucose transporter expression are upregulated in late gestation (98). Studies in preterm pigs also showed that lactose digestive capacity is reduced in formula- versus colostrum-fed pigs (52). Clinical studies have suggested that

preterm infants have poor lactose digestive capacity and that low-lactose formulas reduce feeding intolerance (39, 99, 100). These findings led to concerns that lactose could predispose to NEC, yet the clinical evidence to support this concern was limited (101). Studies in preterm infants showed that the capacity for digestion and absorption of glucose polymers was greater than that for lactose (96), consistent with the developmental pattern of disaccharidase enzymes in human infants (102). The concerns about lactose malabsorption and risk of NEC raised by clinical studies were followed by changes in the formulations of commercial preterm formulas. Current preterm infant formulas contain lactose and maltodextrins or corn syrup solids, a partially digested form of starch, at a ratio of approximately 40:60, respectively. Recent studies in preterm pigs show that formulas containing maltodextrin or corn syrup solids result in significantly higher rates of NEC compared with lactose-containing formulas (103–106). The inclusion of corn syrup solids with up to 50–100% total carbohydrate content leads to a threefold increase in NEC incidence. It should be noted that pigs have a much higher capacity to digest lactose than maltose or glucose polymers, and this is reflected in malabsorption of maltodextrin in preterm pigs (103). The addition of corn syrup solids did not markedly change the gut microbiome profile but resulted in distinct gut metabolomic signatures that clustered with NEC disease (106). These findings imply that the addition of maltodextrin or corn syrup solids may not alter the microbial community structure but rather leads to markedly different products of microbial fermentation compared with lactose. The adverse proinflammatory effects of additive maltodextrins observed in preterm pigs are consistent with other reports in mice showing that maltodextrin promotes depletion of the intestinal mucus layer, enhances the formation of pathogen biofilms, and increases endoplasmic reticulum stress in gut epithelial cells (107–109). These findings raise the question of what is the most appropriate carbohydrate composition in preterm infant formulas. Human milk does not contain maltodextrin or corn syrup solids; thus, the addition of these carbohydrates to current preterm infant formulas is at odds with the desire to model the composition of human milk.

Following preterm birth, the enteral swallowing of amniotic fluid is replaced with variable combinations of PN and advancing volumes of enteral milk diet. Similar to breast milk, amniotic fluid may contain important immunomodulatory, growth, and antimicrobial factors and exosomes that may act similarly to facilitate tolerance to bacterial antigens and dampen excessive Toll-like receptor (TLR)-mediated responses in the perinatal period (110–112). Studies in preterm pigs and mice have shown that feeding amniotic fluid postnatally reduces intestinal inflammation and NEC (113, 114).

Role of the Microbiota in Necrotizing Enterocolitis Pathogenesis

The role of the microbiota in the development and function of the infant gastrointestinal tract is one of the most rapidly advancing areas of research owing to the development of genomic sequencing approaches to identify microbes in different body sites and fluids. Recent reports of microbial DNA in placenta, amniotic fluid, and meconium samples from preterm infants have challenged the idea that the fetal environment is sterile (115). The presence of milk-associated microbiota has been implicated as another factor in the protective effects of breastfeeding on the human infant. In the context of NEC, there is evidence that the microbiota communities are characterized by high levels of facultative anaerobes and abundance of *Proteobacteria* and low levels of *Bifidobacterium* and *Bacteroides* (116).

The evidence linking bacteria in the pathogenesis of NEC includes signs of luminal bowel gas production (e.g., pneumatosis intestinalis), products of bacterial fermentation (e.g., short-chain fatty acids), and epidemic outbreaks of NEC (63, 65). Early studies in gnotobiotic quail, a lactase-deficient species, colonized with infant fecal bacteria and fed a lactose-based formula produced

NEC-like lesions (6). In the past decade, several studies in pigs have provided strong evidence that colonization of the preterm gut with microbes is a necessary element in NEC pathogenesis. Cesarean-derived, newborn, preterm pigs fed infant formula developed a markedly higher NEC rate (57%) when reared conventionally versus in germ-free isolators. Another study showed that in utero, esophageal infusion of infant formula to fetal pigs at 105 days of gestation failed to induce NEC, whereas littermate preterm pigs delivered by cesarean 24 h later and fed formula for 24 h experienced a 38% NEC rate (4). Subsequent studies with preterm pigs given antibiotics that are frequently administered to human preterm infants (ampicillin, gentamicin, and metronidazole) showed that oral, but not parenteral, treatment reduced gut bacterial colonization, inflammation, and NEC lesions (4, 117, 118). Further evidence suggests that oral antibiotic administration prevented NEC by enhancing maturation of blood neutrophils and by diminishing gut colonization, permeability, and translocation of gram-positive bacteria. These pig studies strongly link gut bacterial colonization to NEC pathogenesis; however, the precise mechanism remains unclear. The evidence in pigs suggests that antibiotic treatment is an effective preventive against NEC, but major concerns for antibiotic resistance have limited the adoption of this practice. In fact, evidence in human studies is mixed as to whether antibiotic exposure creates a dysbiosis that may predispose to NEC (119, 120).

Prebiotics and Probiotics in Necrotizing Enterocolitis Prevention

Human milk oligosaccharides (HMOs) are another important carbohydrate component of human breast milk that has been implicated in the protection against NEC. Mammalian milks contain a variety of oligosaccharides that are free glycan molecules composed of different monosaccharides (glucose, galactose, *N*-acetylglucosamine, fucose, and *N*-acetylneuraminic acid) linked to a lactose core (121–124). The concentration in mammalian milks varies among species, being the highest in colostrum and decreased in mature milk. Human milk oligosaccharide concentration decreases from 24 to 12 g/L, whereas that in bovine and porcine milk decreases from approximately 1 to 0.05 g/L and 12 to 7 g/L, respectively. Various studies have shown that HMOs have multiple direct beneficial functions in the neonatal gut, including increased mucosal growth, barrier function, immunomodulation, and pathogen defense (121). In addition to direct host action, milk oligosaccharides function as prebiotics because they are resistant to gut enzymatic digestion and pass into the colon, where they are readily fermented by select groups of microbes. HMOs are an important prebiotic substrate for the growth of *Bifidobacterium* species that commonly colonize and represent the dominant genus in breastfed term infants but are less abundant in preterm infants. These and other bacterial species that grow readily on HMOs lower gut pH by producing short-chain fatty acids. In addition, conditioned media from *Bifidobacterium infantis* fermentation suppress the release of proinflammatory cytokines in intestinal epithelial cell cultures. Several prebiotic oligosaccharides, including galactooligosaccharides, fructooligosaccharides, oligofructose and inulin, and polydextrose, have been produced commercially and shown to increase the abundance of bifidobacteria and lactobacilli, similar to HMOs (125).

Many recent studies have examined the nutritional function of oligosaccharides in the diet of term and preterm neonatal pigs under normal healthy conditions and when challenged with a viral pathogen (121, 126–128). The oligosaccharides of pig milk are highly sialylated, being more similar to those in bovine than in human milk (129). The *ex vivo* treatment with HMOs increased proliferation and IL-10 production of cultured peripheral blood mononuclear cells isolated from sow-fed and formula-fed term neonatal pigs (130). Studies in neonatal pigs challenged with rotavirus showed that feeding formula supplemented with HMOs or mixtures of prebiotic oligosaccharides reduced the duration of diarrhea and enhanced T helper type 1 interferon-gamma and

IL-10 cytokines in the ileum (131). Moreover, HMO-fed pigs have twice as many natural killer cells and 36% more mesenteric lymph node effector memory T cells, suggesting improved mucosal immune function (132). Feeding neonatal pigs formula supplemented with polydextrose reduced pH and increased lactic acid in cecal and colonic contents in association with lowered ileal proinflammatory cytokine expression (133). Other pig studies with mixtures of polydextrose and galactooligosaccharides have shown changes in lactobacilli without impacting gut barrier function (121).

FMT: fecal
microbiome transfer

In the past 20 years, several randomized controlled trials and cohort studies in preterm infants have demonstrated that probiotic treatment prevents NEC (134). These clinical studies have used different bacterial species, with oral doses of bacteria usually higher than a billion organisms per day. The prevention of NEC seems most effective when infants are given both *Bifidobacterium* and *Lactobacillus* species. Fewer randomized controlled trials in preterm infants have investigated the effect of prebiotics in the prevention of NEC (135). These studies show that prebiotics are safe and can decrease the incidence of sepsis and mortality but not NEC. Most of the prebiotics tested in preterm infant studies include short-chain galactooligosaccharides/long-chain fructooligosaccharides and pectin-derived acidic oligosaccharides. An important point and potential limitation of these studies is that many of the prebiotics tested in clinical trials are neither derived from nor present in human milk and thus may have different functions than HMOs normally consumed by infants.

There are several studies of both probiotics and prebiotics in preterm pigs, and these studies have produced mixed results regarding protection against NEC. Treatment with a mixture of probiotic species, including *Bifidobacterium animalis* and different lactobacilli, such as *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus casei*, *Lactobacillus pentosus*, *Lactobacillus plantarum* (10^9 CFU each species/each feeding) (136), or a single probiotic species, *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* (10^{11} CFU/day) (137), generally reduced the incidence of NEC. An exception was the increased incidence of NEC in preterm pigs inoculated with *Lactobacillus paracasei*, *B. animalis*, and *Streptococcus thermophilus* (10^{10} CFU/day). Few studies have examined the prebiotic protective effects in prevention of NEC, but all of these studies have tested HMOs rather than non-HMOs. A study comparing a mixture of 4 versus 25 different HMO blends found that these HMOs suppressed intestinal epithelial cell proliferation and had a modest immunomodulatory effect in the intestine in vivo but did not prevent NEC or diarrhea when added to formula and fed to preterm pigs for 5–11 days after birth (126). Addition of mixtures of bovine milk oligosaccharides was well tolerated but did not improve any clinical outcomes in preterm pigs (138). Studies in preterm pigs also tested whether adding the HMO α -1,2-fucosyllactose (2'-FL) was protective against NEC and challenge with enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* F18 because 2'-FL has structural homology to bacterial adhesion sites in the intestine (127, 128). Both of these studies showed that addition of 2'-FL to formula-fed preterm pigs did not reduce or prevent diarrhea or NEC incidence in the first week of life. The lack of 2'-FL effect in these pig studies may be due to the fact that pigs produce a relative abundance of α -1,2'-fucose in the intestine and thus may not be reliant on exogenous 2'-FL in the diet. These studies also suggest that dietary 2'-FL may not be critical in the immediate postnatal period of preterm neonates, when gut colonization and intestinal immunity are still immature. Taken together, the studies in neonatal pigs suggest that prebiotics, both human milk derived and nonhuman milk derived, have a greater influence on intestinal immune function in term compared with preterm pigs. The lack of response to HMOs in preterm pigs maybe due to the immaturity of the mucosal and systemic innate immunity or the relatively short duration of the studies.

In addition to therapeutic approaches using defined probiotic preparations, fecal microbiome transfer (FMT) has rapidly emerged as a tool to demonstrate the sufficiency of the microbiota to

TLR4: Toll-like
receptor 4

NF-κB:
nuclear factor-κB

transfer the donor phenotype to the recipient host (115, 139). This approach has become a standard of care in the treatment of recurrent *Clostridium difficile* infection in humans (140). The use of FMT has recently emerged as an approach to protect against NEC and modify the gut microbiome in mice, rats, and preterm pigs (141–144). Interestingly, the study in preterm pigs showed that rectal compared with oral FMT administration may be a safer and more tolerable route in the preterm host, in which innate immunity and intestinal barrier function are poorly developed (141). These early studies using FMT in neonates raise several important questions as to the source and amount of donor fecal samples, as well as the route (oral, orogastric tube feeds, rectal) and frequency of administration. The use of preterm pigs will be a useful model for investigating these questions.

Host Factors in Necrotizing Enterocolitis Pathogenesis

Intestinal immunity. The fetal intestine develops with very limited exposure to microbes and is bathed in amniotic fluid that is swallowed during gestation. The abrupt transition to the extrauterine environment after birth requires the innate immune system for protection from infection (10). The mucosal epithelium is a major element of innate immunity and a key interface between the neonatal host and gut microbiota after birth. A major function of the mucosal epithelium is to facilitate cross talk between the commensal microbiota and the host immune system to prevent inappropriate inflammatory responses and enable tolerance. It has become evident that the premature exposure of the mucosal epithelium to bacteria or their products (e.g., LPS) before normal term birth induces an excessive mucosal inflammatory response (145, 146). One key molecular mechanism that mediates the premature inflammatory response to LPS involves increased expression and signaling via the Toll-like receptor 4 (TLR4) pathway (147). Recent animal studies confirm this hypothesis and show that exposure of the perinatal intestine to LPS after birth induces rapid loss of LPS responsiveness and nuclear factor-κB (NF-κB) activation in epithelial cells. This appears to be mediated by posttranscriptional downregulation of the interleukin 1 receptor–associated kinase 1, which is essential for epithelial TLR4 signaling. This pattern of epithelial immune maturation is analogous to the well-known immunological development of the lung epithelium following experimental prenatal gram-negative bacterial LPS or chorioamnionitis, a common cause of preterm delivery (148, 149). These results suggest that perinatal development of inflammatory tolerance to bacterial endotoxins occurs after an initial limited pre-exposure, and there is supporting evidence for this phenomenon with other bacterial TLR ligands, including flagellin (150, 151).

Intestinal blood flow, mucosal perfusion, and ischemia. Intestinal microcirculatory dysfunction leading to ischemia appears to play a central role in the establishment and progression of NEC (71, 76, 152, 153). In an excellent review, Nowicki (71) addresses the central questions regarding the role of ischemia in the pathogenesis of NEC, namely, where, when, and how it occurs. Studies from this group using pigs provided important information about developmental changes in neonatal intestinal blood flow and mucosal perfusion. The dominant factor in intestinal blood flow is vascular resistance, and the main sites of resistance are in submucosal arterioles. The high metabolic demand of the intestinal epithelium for digestive and absorptive processes, particularly after enteral feeding, together with the vascular architecture of the villus creates an oxygen gradient that makes the villus tip hypoxic under normal conditions (154). This “physiological hypoxia” has an even steeper gradient in the distal parts of the intestine (155). Early studies in pigs showed that asphyxia induced intestinal ischemic injury that resembled NEC (69, 156). However, the magnitude of the insult together with the cellularity of the intestinal mucosal damage did not

match the development of NEC in infants, because intrapartum asphyxia and occurrence of NEC during the first week of life are rare (157–159). Attempts to link NEC to derangements in macro-circulatory intestinal blood flow, i.e., the superior mesenteric artery, have yielded mixed results (153).

There are important differences among species regarding villus microvascular architecture (76); whereas pigs and humans have a single central arteriole arborizing at the tip of the villus and converging into one or two venules, rodent architecture is quite different. In rats, the single central arteriole does not branch until it reaches the tip of the villus, where it forms a capillary network (160). In contrast, mice have two arterioles that provide oxygenated blood to the villus, which after division into a capillary network converge into a single venule that extends from the tip to the base of the villus (76). In rats, newborns have a simpler villous plexus than adults (160), and this may contribute to their inability to vasodilate and maintain perfusion, thereby increasing the susceptibility to mucosal damage during periods of decreased perfusion (161).

Studies with pigs born at term and studied up until 35 days of age show that vascular resistance is low at birth and increases with age. The dominant factors that regulate the balance between vasoconstriction (mediated mainly by endothelin-1, ET-1) and vasodilation (mediated mainly by nitric oxide, NO) are tilted toward vasodilation in term newborn pigs. In pigs, vasoconstriction occurs in neonates after moderate ischemia/reperfusion (but not in older animals) and can be attenuated by blocking the ET-1 receptor type (ET_A) (162). These results mimic observations in humans in which the concentration of ET-1 was greater in necrotic areas compared with apparently healthy tissue and inhibition of the receptor (ET_A) resulted in vasodilation of submucosal arterioles (163).

In pigs, NO-mediated vasodilation was shown to be greater in newborns than in older subjects (152). However, submucosal arterioles from infants that developed NEC showed reduced production of NO and as a consequence failed to dilate in response to blood flow (164). In addition, low arginine availability seems to be another factor in the reduced NO response in neonates. Arginine is the precursor for NO production, and arginine supplementation has been shown to prevent NEC in preterm infants (165). The endogenous production of arginine relies on the production of citrulline by the gut, which is then converted into arginine by the kidney (166). Premature pigs showed a reduced enteral citrulline production that preceded the onset of NEC (79), thus reducing arginine availability in these animals. Despite the reports that arginine protects against NEC, studies in term, neonatal pigs have shown that enteral arginine did not increase superior mesenteric arterial blood flow (167).

Changes in gut tissue oxygenation are compounded by the activation and recruitment of innate immune cells, leading to inflammation (168). Premature pigs display immature gut morphology and digestive function (169, 170), which can lead to bacterial overgrowth (53). Activation of TLR4 by LPS results in the release of critical proinflammatory cytokines that have been shown to increase ET-1 expression and disrupt mucosal barrier function (171). Studies in preterm pigs showed that the transition from TPN to enteral feeding of formula, but not porcine colostrum, triggered an increase in intestinal TLR4 and proinflammatory cytokine expression (172). The combined early activation of TLR4-mediated inflammation in intestinal epithelial cells and microcirculatory endothelial cells leads to reduced intestinal perfusion and hypoxia that initiate the pathogenesis of NEC (63). Evidence in mice further supports the protective role of NO, showing that endothelial nitric oxide synthase knockout increases, but sildenafil and sodium nitrate treatment reduces, the severity of NEC (63). In contrast, activation of TLR9 by unmethylated bacterial CpG DNA seems to inhibit LPS-mediated TLR4 signaling (173). This may be the mechanism of action by which the administration of an ultraviolet-inactivated *L. rhamnosus* attenuated the severity of NEC in premature pigs (137).

ET-1: endothelin-1

NO: nitric oxide

The use of near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) allows for the continuous, noninvasive monitoring of tissue oxygenation in neonates (174). Initially developed to monitor cerebral oxygenation (175), NIRS has also been used to monitor other regions of the body, including splanchnic organs (176). The size of the neonatal premature pig is similar to that of a human neonate, which has allowed for the use of abdominal NIRS (aNIRS) in pig models of NEC. Measurements of splanchnic oxygen saturation using aNIRS have been validated in anesthetized pigs by altering oxygen concentration in the anesthesia circuit. A high correlation between the aNIRS determinations and the oxygen saturation in mesenteric blood (177) or portal blood (178) supports the validity of this noninvasive tool to monitor intestinal perfusion. The continuous NIRS monitoring from birth has shown that premature pigs with lower aNIRS were more susceptible to developing NEC once enteral feeds were introduced (177, 179). For this reason, aNIRS may be useful in identifying those neonates susceptible to NEC prior to clinical manifestation of the disease (180).

MODELING INTESTINAL ADAPTATION AND SHORT BOWEL SYNDROME IN PIGS

SBS is a clinical condition that results from surgical resection, congenital defect, or disease-associated loss of absorption, leading to an inability to maintain nutrient balance when fed a normal diet (3). The incidence of SBS is twice as high in pediatrics (24.5 versus 9/100,000 live births) as in adults. The SBS incidence is approximately 100-fold higher in preterm versus term infants, mainly related to the higher incidence of NEC in preterm infants compared with other congenital causes, such as gastroschisis and intestinal atresia (181). The condition of SBS results from surgical resection of intestine, which triggers a process in the remnant intestine known as intestinal adaptation, which involves a coordinated increase in gut hormone secretion, mucosal growth, and secretory function (**Figure 3**). Many of these physiological processes that occur during intestinal adaptation were described in early studies with rat models (182), and some groups have extended this to mice (3). Importantly, the adaptation process depends on the subtypes of surgical resection that occur, either proximal intestine (jejunal) resection, ileal-colonic resection, or distal bowel resection with jejunostomy.

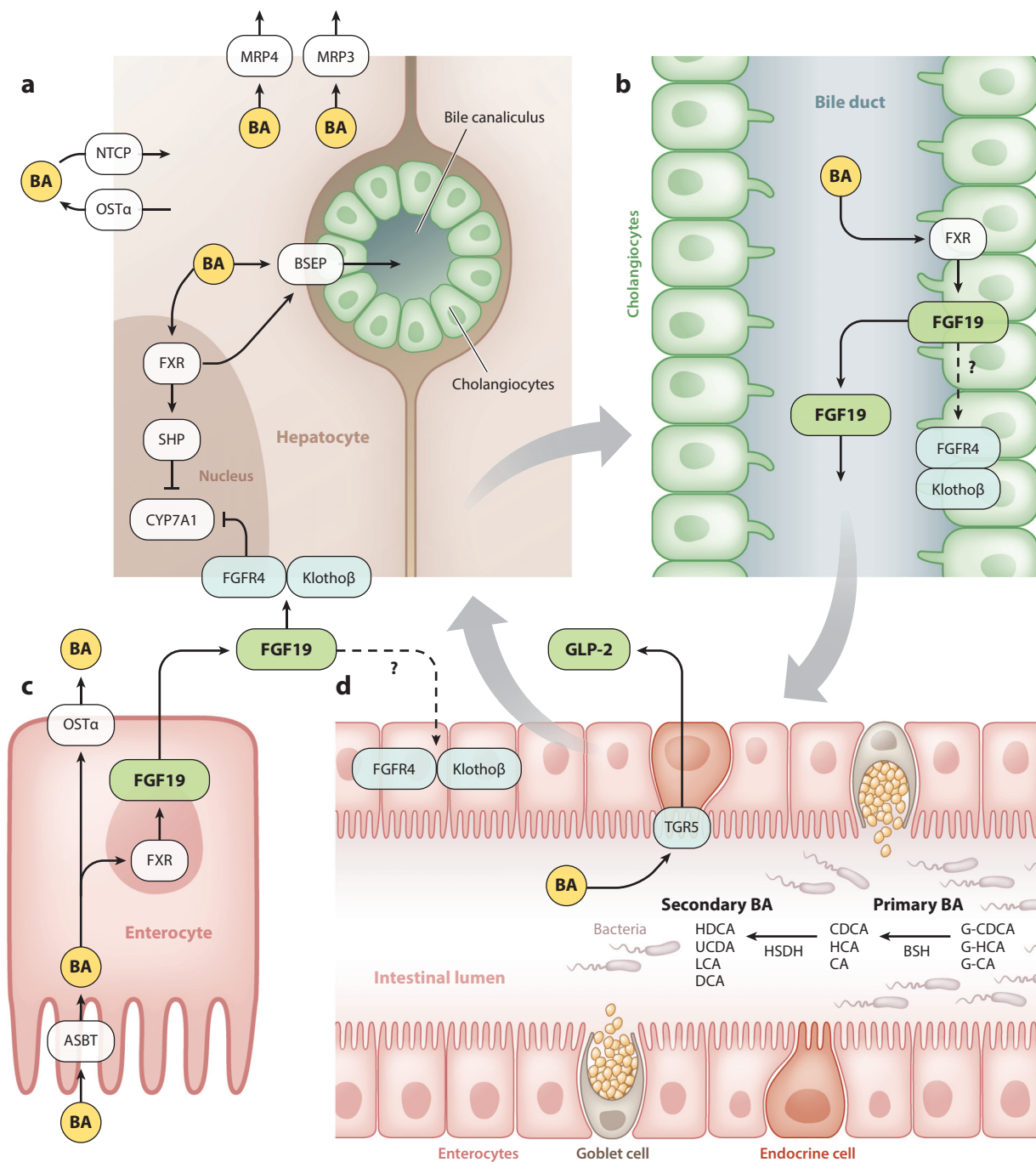
Models of SBS and intestinal adaptation have been developed in pigs of various ages, including preterm and term newborn pigs, juvenile pigs, and adult pigs (3, 183–188). Because SBS incidence is highest in infants, there is a need to understand how organ immaturity and stage of development affect the response to intestinal resection. Most investigators have performed a mid-intestinal, jejuno-ileal resection where the remaining small intestine consists of equal parts of jejunum and ileum. The postresection period has generally been longest (4–6 weeks) in studies on older pigs (183, 189). In contrast, only short-term (one-week) responses to resection have been studied in pigs younger than one week of age (185, 190, 191), except the studies on PN-fed term pigs (184, 192). The pig model of SBS has many advantages over rodent models in that repeated measurements, such as stool/ostomy output, plasma GLP-2 and citrulline, and clinical chemistry values, can be measured longitudinally to monitor clinical adaptation response in SBS pigs, especially in long-term studies (193). Additionally, other *in vivo* measurements of gut function can be made in pigs, such as nutrient uptake or nutrient digestibility, permeability using xylose absorption and portal blood flow, and nutrient flux. Another advantage of pigs that is ethically difficult in human SBS patients is that tissue samples can be collected at study endpoints to directly measure intestinal tissue growth and functional activity, such as villus height, crypt depth, crypt cell proliferation, apoptosis, and disaccharidase activity in the remnant intestine.

The pig model has been important in investigating the trophic effects of enteral nutrition and gut growth factors, especially GLP-2, in the intestinal adaptation response during SBS. In the

context of pediatric SBS, nutrition is vital not only as a stimulus of local intestinal growth but also for body growth of the developing infant. Enteral feeding is preferred to reduce the detrimental consequences of PN. Luminal nutrients are the most potent stimulus for intestinal adaptation and act directly to provide metabolic substrates for enterocytes and to trigger the increase in pancreatic-biliary secretions, neural factors, intestinal blood flow, and release of intestinal hormones and growth factors such as GLP-2 and EGF (29, 194). In the early phase after surgical resection, infants with SBS initially are fed small volumes of enteral nutrition along with PN. There is limited evidence as to the best source of enteral nutrition for SBS patients. Human milk is the recommended diet for infants, including those with SBS, and is becoming more widely used with the increasing availability of human milk banks, yet infants often receive formulas. As discussed above, studies in healthy, newborn, term pigs indicate that natural milks and colostrum (porcine, bovine, and human) have a greater trophic stimulus for intestinal growth than infant formulas. In studies with SBS pigs, however, the results show that the trophic effect of natural milk versus formula is mixed and not uniformly beneficial (195, 196).

Intestinal Trophic Action of GLP-2

The endogenous secretion and therapeutic effects of several hormones and growth factors, including GLP-2, EGF, growth hormone, IGF-1, and insulin, have been examined in the context of SBS mainly in animal models (3). The most well studied of these trophic factors in pigs is GLP-2, which is the only gut hormone that is approved for therapeutic use in treatment of SBS in children and adults. Studies in adult and pediatric SBS patients have shown clinical benefits of treatment with the long-acting GLP-2 analog (teduglutide, GATTEX®) (197, 198) (**Figure 4**). GLP-2 is a key trophic factor in intestinal adaptation. Infusion of GLP-2 in parenterally fed pigs acutely increased superior mesenteric arterial and portal venous blood flow, and these vascular effects were NO dependent (199–201). Infusion of GLP-2 in parenterally fed pigs also prevents mucosal atrophy by maintaining increased rates of intestinal crypt cell proliferation and protein synthesis and suppressing apoptosis (202–204). The trophic effects of GLP-2 infusion maintain intestinal digestive and absorptive function in TPN-fed pigs (205). Chronic GLP-2 treatment for six weeks after birth also increased intestinal growth in pigs nourished on the sow for three weeks and then weaned and fed a commercial swine diet (206). Studies in neonatal pigs and preterm infants show that enteral nutrition triggers secretion of GLP-2, whereas PN leads to low circulating concentrations (29, 207). A series of studies in SBS neonatal pigs showed that circulating GLP-2 increases following bowel resection, but this response required distal bowel continuity; furthermore, enteral nutrition augmented the intestinal trophic response (188, 190, 192, 208). More recent studies in neonatal SBS pigs treated with the natural peptide and long-acting analogs of human GLP-2, including teduglutide and apraglutide, demonstrated intestinal trophic effects that were enhanced by enteral nutrition (190, 191, 209–212); other long-acting GLP-2 analogs also are being developed (213). Studies in mice show that the trophic effects of GLP-2 are mediated by local paracrine secretion of EGF and IGF-1 from subepithelial myofibroblasts (214, 215). Recent studies in SBS pigs treated with GLP-2 or EGF alone and in combination demonstrated that the trophic effects of GLP-2 are greater than those of EGF, but combined treatment increased intestinal length, suggesting synergy between GLP-2 and EGF (216). New approaches have been tested in pigs to increase endogenous GLP-2 secretion using enteral administration of a natural agonist to Takeda G-protein-coupled receptor 5 (188, 217). Both the primary bile acid, chenodeoxycholic acid (CDCA), and the triterpenoid, ursolic acid, potentially increased GLP-2 secretion in parenterally fed pigs, but their capacity to augment GLP-2 secretion above that triggered by enteral nutrition in conditions of SBS was limited (188).



(Caption appears on following page)

Figure 4 (*Figure appears on preceding page*)

Enterohepatic cell and molecular mechanisms of BA transport and signaling. Illustrated are the interorgan and intercellular transport of BAs and their signaling pathways in the liver and gut. BAs function as hormonal signaling molecules that activate FXR and TGR5 in the liver, biliary ducts, and intestinal endocrine cells. FXR is a master BA-sensing nuclear receptor that regulates expression of genes in BA synthesis and transport in the liver and BA transport in the intestine. BA activation of FXR induces secretion of FGF19 mainly in intestinal enterocytes, but also in hepatocytes and cholangiocytes. BA activation of TGR5 induces secretion of GLP-1/GLP-2 in intestinal endocrine cells. Gut bacteria shape the profile of BA species via enzymatic conversion via BSH and HSDH. Abbreviations: ASBT, apical sodium-dependent bile acid transporter; BA, bile acid; BSH, bile salt hydrolase; BSEP, bile salt export pump; CA, cholic acid; CDCA, chenodeoxycholic acid; CYP7A1, cytochrome P450 family 7 subfamily A member 1; DCA, deoxycholic acid; FGF19, fibroblast growth factor 19; FGFR4, fibroblast growth factor receptor 4; FXR, farnesoid X receptor; G-CA, glyco-cholic acid; G-CDCA, glyco-chenodeoxycholic acid; G-HCA, glyco-hyocholic acid; GLP, glucagon-like peptide; HCA, hyocholic acid; HDCA, hyodeoxycholic acid; HSDH, hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase; LCA, lithocholic acid; MRP3, multidrug resistance associated protein 3; MRP4, multidrug resistance protein 4; NTCP, Na⁺-taurocholate cotransporting polypeptide; OST α , organic solute transporter α ; SHP, small heterodimer partner; TGR5, Takeda G-protein receptor 5.

MODELING PARENTERAL NUTRITION-ASSOCIATED LIVER DISEASE IN PIGS

PN is a lifesaving nutritional support for thousands of premature and term hospitalized infants in the United States annually. Many premature infants are nourished solely by PN following the surgical removal of the gastrointestinal tract owing to congenital or acquired disease-related causes, mainly NEC. A challenge in the care of premature infants is to provide sufficient nutrition to meet their high metabolic needs for growth, but at the same time minimize the risk for PNALD (218, 219). Cholestasis in premature infants, a key element of PNALD, presents clinically as increased serum biochemical markers, such as direct bilirubin, bile acids, and liver transaminases (22, 220). Steatosis may occur in many patients, but it often goes undetected because liver biopsy, with its attendant risk, is required for definitive diagnosis (221). The incidence of cholestatic liver disease can be as high as 50% in premature infants given PN for prolonged periods. These high-risk premature infants on prolonged PN often have concurrent intestinal disease, resulting from surgical bowel resection as described above for SBS; this condition has been termed intestinal failure-associated liver disease (IFALD) (220). There is also epidemiological evidence that the incidence of PNALD/IFALD is higher in infants who have suffered NEC (222). PNALD occurs mainly in infancy, yet the ability to model PNALD in neonatal animals is limited by the ability to surgically implant and maintain venous catheters for administration of PN solutions. Thus, most studies of PNALD in neonatal animals have been conducted using pigs, at both term (223–226) and preterm (227–229) stages of development. The neonatal guinea pig also has been used to effectively model infant PNALD and the role of oxidative stress (230). The mouse has been used to model PNALD but at older ages of adolescent and adult stages (8–12 weeks) (231–234). PNALD pathogenesis is thought to involve several factors, including PN nutrient composition, inflammation, gestational age, and lack of enteral feeding as a stimulus of the gut.

New-Generation Lipid Emulsions May Prevent Parenteral Nutrition-Associated Liver Disease: Role of Phytosterols and Vitamin E

Lipids make a significant contribution to the energy and essential fatty acid needs of parenterally fed infants. Since the introduction of parenteral lipid emulsions decades ago, the first lipid emulsion approved for pediatric use has been Intralipid®, a soybean oil emulsion. However, in recent years, new-generation lipid emulsions have been developed containing pure olive oil (Clinoleic®); pure fish oil (Omegaven®); or various blends of soy, olive, safflower, medium-chain triglyceride, and fish oil [Lipofundin®, Liposyn II®, SMOFlipid® (SMOF), Lipoplus®] that have been approved or are pending approval for pediatric use. The link between PNALD and lipid

emulsions became evident from clinical studies in pediatric PNALD patients demonstrating the efficacy of Omegaven (235, 236) to treat PNALD in infants previously nourished with soybean oil emulsions. More recent randomized controlled trials have shown that SMOFlipid compared with soybean oil emulsion reduced markers of cholestasis in infants with IFALD (237) but did not reduce PNALD in otherwise healthy extremely low-birth-weight infants (238).

Studies in neonatal preterm and term pigs support the observations that both Omegaven and SMOFlipid can reduce or prevent PNALD (225, 228). Interestingly, SMOFlipid also improves insulin sensitivity and promotes higher lean body mass compared with Intralipid in preterm TPN-fed pigs (239). The mechanism that explains the protective effect of Omegaven and SMOF against PNALD is not clear, but phytosterols have been implicated. Phytosterols are cholesterol-like molecules that are enriched in plant-based oils, such as soybean oil, whereas their concentration in SMOF is relatively low, and they are absent in Omegaven. Infants given soybean oil emulsions for prolonged periods (longer than a month) are at increased risk for developing PNALD, and this is associated with phytosterol accumulation in plasma and liver tissue (240). A molecular mechanism implicated in the cause of PNALD is that plant phytosterols disrupt the function of the liver farnesoid X receptor (FXR) (**Figure 5**). FXR is a nuclear receptor and is the primary sensor of bile acids that controls the molecular regulation of target genes involved in bile acid homeostasis. Our studies with cultured piglet hepatocytes, and those of others using mouse and human hepatocytes, show that phytosterols antagonize FXR (228, 241). A study in TPN-fed mice showed that addition of the phytosterol stigmasterol to a fish oil emulsion (Omegaven) induced PNALD, but only in the presence of intestinal injury and inflammation (231). In contrast, our study in TPN-fed pigs showed that addition of phytosterols to the fish oil emulsion, Omegaven, did not induce PNALD (227). A hypothesis put forth based on mouse PNALD studies (220) is that the adverse effect of hepatic phytosterol accumulation requires a concurrent inflammatory costimulation from gut-derived LPS that functions as a second hit to trigger activation of proinflammatory cytokines, such as IL-1 β , which in turn suppresses the expression of hepatobiliary transporters for bile acids (bile salt exporter pump, BSEP) and phytosterols (ATP-binding cassette transporter G5/8, ABCG5/8). Our studies in preterm TPN-fed pigs confirm that LPS treatment in vivo induces proinflammatory cytokine secretion and suppresses the hepatic expression of both BSEP and ABCG5/8 (242). In the two-hit model of PNALD, hepatic Kupffer cells are thought to be the source of local IL-1 β . Studies in cultured neonatal pig hepatocytes suggest that phytosterol accumulation alone does not induce IL-1 β . Yet in neonatal pig Kupffer cells, costimulation with LPS coupled with phytosterol accumulation synergistically maximizes the inflammatory response (242). Studies in mice also suggest that blockade of IL-1 β /NF- κ B signaling can prevent PNALD (243). Thus, the studies in TPN-fed neonatal pigs confirm the clinical evidence that lipid emulsions that are low in phytosterols protect against PNALD. Further studies are necessary to demonstrate that accumulation of phytosterols in vivo directly causes PNALD in neonatal pigs and show that this is associated with reduced FXR target gene function.

Vitamin E or tocopherol is another key nutrient that has been implicated in PNALD because the composition of various tocopherols varies widely among different parenteral lipid emulsions (244). Vitamin E protects against fatty liver diseases, such as nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), because it functions as a natural, lipid-soluble antioxidant that reduces cellular oxidative stress in vivo, as well as reducing lipid peroxidation and maintaining the stability of parenteral lipid solutions. A variety of tocopherol isoforms with different biological activities exist in parenteral lipid emulsions depending on the source of lipid. The vitamin E present in most commercial soybean oil lipid emulsions is mainly the γ -tocopherol isoform, whereas in several new-generation emulsions (i.e., Omegaven and SMOFlipid), vitamin E is added in the more bioactive α -tocopherol isoform (244). The differences in vitamin E content in Intralipid, Omegaven, and SMOFlipid

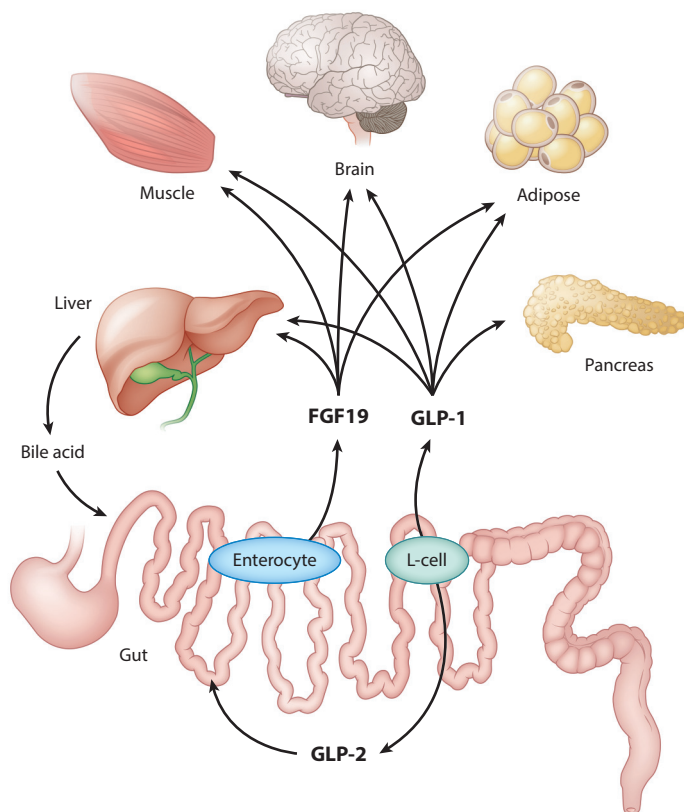


Figure 5

Key gut hormone signals that regulate metabolism. Overview of key hormones produced in the gut that sense dietary nutrients and bile acids. These hormones signal the level of nutrient availability in the gut lumen to the liver and pancreas, but also to peripheral tissues in the body. The metabolic effects of GLP-1/GLP-2 and FGF19 and their role in adult diseases (e.g., diabetes, nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, cholestasis) is an active area of scientific research, but their role in pediatric nutrition and GI diseases is poorly understood. Abbreviations: FGF19, fibroblast growth factor 19; GI, gastrointestinal; GLP-1, glucagon-like peptide 1; GLP-2, glucagon-like peptide 2; L-cell, enteroendocrine L cell.

given to preterm TPN-fed pigs are reflected in the plasma and tissue tocopherol concentrations. Furthermore, the addition of α -tocopherol to Intralipid reduced serum markers of PNALD in preterm TPN-fed pigs, supporting its protective role (227). Recent studies in term TPN-fed pigs, however, showed that added vitamin E is not protective under conditions of increased parenteral soybean-oil lipid intakes and high phytosterol loads (226). These studies suggest that some of the protection against PNALD observed with new-generation lipid emulsions may be mediated by vitamin E when given at relatively low lipid loads with reduced phytosterol content.

Fibroblast Growth Factor 19: A Potential Mechanistic Link to Enterohepatic Bile Acid Signaling and Parenteral Nutrition–Associated Liver Disease

The lack of enteral feeding and associated luminal gut stimulus has been linked to the pathogenesis of PNALD. Attention has been focused on gut hormones that are triggered with enteral feeding, namely cholecystokinin, given its function in promoting gallbladder contraction and

FGF19: fibroblast growth factor 19

CYP7A1: cholesterol 7- α -monooxygenase

bile secretion. However, clinical studies suggest that cholecystokinin treatment does not prevent PNALD in infants (245). Recent attention has focused on fibroblast growth factor 19 (FGF19), a gut-derived enterokine hormone secreted in response to feeding and the presence of bile acids in the gut lumen. FGF19 is one of the 22 members of the fibroblast growth factor (FGF) family (246), most of which are paracrine growth factors (**Figure 4**). The FGF19 protein is part of the FGF19 subfamily (FGF15/19, FGF21, and FGF23), members of which function as endocrine hormones. FGF19 activates cell function by binding to a membrane localized tyrosine kinase receptor, FGF receptor 4, and the heterodimeric partner, β -klotho. Importantly, humans and pigs produce FGF19 in the intestine and liver, whereas mice and rats express the human ortholog FGF15, and only in the intestine (247), thus making the pig a relevant model of human FGF19 biology. FGF19 is most well-known for its role as a downstream target of FXR, and studies in mice first showed that bile acid stimulation induces intestinal expression of FGF15 (248). FGF19 produced in the small intestine circulates into portal blood and leads to suppression of the rate-limiting enzyme in bile acid synthesis, cholesterol 7- α -monooxygenase (CYP7A1), in hepatocytes via activation of extracellular-signal-regulated kinase (ERK) mitogen-activated kinase pathways. Thus, bile acid activation of intestinal FXR-FGF19 is a key negative feedback signal to suppress hepatic bile acid synthesis. In support of this FXR-FGF19-mediated mechanism, we first showed that plasma FGF19 is suppressed by TPN and that enteral treatment with CDCA induces circulating FGF19 and prevents cholestasis (217). Our unpublished results show that a selective and potent FXR agonist, obeticholic acid (OCA), prevents cholestasis by activating FXR-target genes involved in hepatobiliary bile acid transport, preventing loss of bile duct structure, and inducing a robust dose-dependent increase in circulating FGF19. OCA is a potent, first-in-class FXR agonist derived from CDCA that was recently Food and Drug Administration approved under the name Ocaliva[®] to treat primary biliary cholangitis and is being developed to treat NAFLD and biliary atresia (249). These new promising results point to multiple mechanisms whereby therapeutic use of enteral OCA may prevent PNALD.

The primary factor that stimulates intestinal FGF19 secretion appears to be bile acids secreted into the gut lumen after oral feeding. This explains why chronic parenteral rather than enteral nutrition results in reduced FGF19 secretion (217). There is limited information about the ontogeny and developmental regulation of FGF19, yet one report showed that in human infants, the plasma FGF19 concentration increased tenfold between birth and 4 months of age and was lower in growth-restricted infants (250). A recent study in preterm infants showed that advancing gestational age correlated with plasma FGF19 and the bile acid synthesis marker 7 α -hydroxy-4-cholestene-3-one. This marker has been used as a surrogate for activity of CYP7A1, the rate-limiting enzyme in the classic bile acid synthesis pathway (251). This study found that CYP7A1 activity is upregulated with gestational age and volume of enteral feeding, but in contrast, circulating FGF19 concentrations are higher in preterm infants and decline with advancing age. We postulate that FGF19 secretion increases with stage of development as enteral feeding, and bile acid synthesis and secretion, begins after birth. Consistent with Sánchez-Infantes et al.'s (250) findings in infants, but in contrast to those of Memon et al. (251), our unpublished results show that the plasma concentration and intestinal mRNA expression of FGF19 in preterm pigs are markedly lower than in term pigs and increase during the neonatal period. The similarity between pigs and humans with regard to the gut–liver axis and FXR–FGF19 signaling makes pigs a useful model to investigate the significance of gestational age and factors that regulate FGF19 function in early development.

The most well-characterized function of FGF19 is its role in the regulation of enterohepatic bile acid homeostasis. However, additional reports show that FGF19 functions as a metabolic hormone with actions similar to insulin, such as suppression of endogenous glucose production,

gluconeogenesis, and lipolysis and increased insulin sensitivity and glycogen synthesis (252). There is emerging evidence that FGF19 also induces protein anabolism based on reports in mice showing increased liver protein synthesis and skeletal muscle hypertrophy via activation of both the ERK and the ribosomal protein S6 kinase pathways. These reports suggest that FGF19 activates similar signaling pathways to insulin and thus has overlapping metabolic actions. This is important because we have shown that the circulating FGF19 concentration as well as insulin sensitivity and lean tissue mass are greater in enteral versus TPN-fed pigs (217, 223). Thus, the intestinal enterokine FGF19 may function similar to insulin in response to oral feeding to enhance insulin sensitivity and promote protein synthesis and lean tissue growth.

CONCLUSIONS

Pigs have been valuable animal models for biomedical research for decades, but in recent years they have been refined and particularly relevant for pediatric nutrition, as well as gastrointestinal and liver diseases. Pigs enable approaches that are not feasible in rodent models, serving as an important translational model to bridge the gap between mechanistic mouse models and human clinical studies. This is especially important in the case of premature infants, whose physiological fragility and ethical considerations make it prohibitive to conduct certain experiments. The neonatal pig has become a popular preclinical model for testing of nutritional and therapeutic agents targeted at these pediatric gut and liver diseases.

Several groups use term neonatal pigs to model human infant intestinal development, as well as fundamental responses to diet (colostrum versus formula), probiotics, HMOs, and gut microbe colonization patterns. The PN-fed, neonatal pig has provided a clinically relevant pediatric model showing that lack of enteral nutrition leads to deterioration of the gut, marked by intestinal mucosal atrophy, reduced digestive function and maturation, and increased permeability. Studies in neonatal pigs demonstrate the importance of minimal enteral nutrition and its impact on triggering secretion of trophic intestinal gut hormones (e.g., GLP-2). Studies in SBS pigs revealed the safety and efficacy of GLP-2 and its long-acting analogs being developed for treatment of pediatric patients.

The preterm pig has gained acceptance as a clinically relevant NEC model that has established key features of disease pathogenesis, especially prematurity, the importance of the microbiota, and enteral feeding. The preterm pig will continue to be a valuable preclinical model to address important questions about the safety and efficacy of new therapeutic approaches to shaping the developing gut microbiota in infants, including probiotics, prebiotics, and microbiota transfer. Pigs also will be valuable to test emerging questions concerning the nutritional value of donor human milk and human milk fortifiers to support optimal preterm infant growth and prevent NEC.

The neonatal pig serves an important role in modeling PNALD in infants and demonstrating the protective effects of new-generation lipid emulsions. Further studies with pigs will be important to establish a direct causative role for phytosterols in PNALD. Finally, studies in pigs were first to link low-circulating FGF19 to PNALD. Thus, with the emergence of selective FXR agonists and FGF19 analogs, pigs will play a critical role in evaluating the efficacy of drugs to augment intestinal secretion and plasma levels of FGF19 in treatment and prevention of PNALD.

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